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Fiction of the Fifties

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Above the Burning Plain—a story

LEONARD R. HOFFMAN:
Mr. and Mrs. Jazz—a story

JOSEPH BENNETT:
The Gladiators—a long poem

ROBERT BRUSTEIN:
Williams' Nebulous Nightmare

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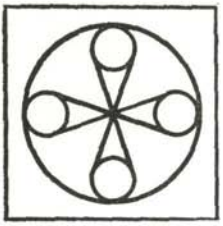

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The Hudson Review

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JOSEPH BENNETT

The Gladiators

A nation
Reared on luxury
Stuffed with milk
Takes psychic calories
Its stomachs can ill afford
And the waistline trembles
About its accustomed norm,
But the mind, stuffed, outfed,
Into a bladder of soft and white-fleshed cabbage
Grows enormous
Like sweetbreads
All pulpy, cranial extrusions,
Lobes of fat, and cauliflower growths
Cropping between the ears.

For this, that Caesar was called *Regina,*
He walks upon our screens.
Nero, Elagabalus, Commodus, Caracalla,
Caligula and Domitian,
The imperial madness is across the face of our children
And our adults tear the bark from trees
With the barbs of fishhooks, twisted in their fingers,
Thinking of the human eye,
Across their knuckles, slashing at the forest,
Write badly,
And nightly we await the announcement
Of the first arena.

In the long sullenness of life without event
And child-rearing without purpose,
Without cause, other than a human act,
Event, presupposed; self-perpetuation, possibly;
Immortality, putative;
In a life without cause, without effect,
Devoted to the creation of more life, by conventional means,

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Equally causeless,
What are the noises we hear
Of a breaking out, a revolt in a school at Praeneste?
Like that earlier, in Capua?
The trainers, entrepreneurs, hirers-out,
Disturbed at the loss of their valuable live-stock.
For, if recovered, they must be killed,
The *patibulum* is ready,
It is the law.
And in every household
When the master is murdered,
All must die.
The *patibulum* is ready.
And what is this new cult,
Sweeping across the Orient?
Jews, Jews, would you lie down with Jews?

'The cost of a troop of gladiators may be recovered in as little as
two showings'
If the price is right, if the shows are attended, if they are festivals,
last all week,
There is no rain,
Garland-bedecked
The victims
With net and trident,
Long and short sword, blunted and pointed,
Naked, and with wild beasts,
Helmeted, unhelmeted, greaved, ungreaved,
Armored and naked,
A sign, a sign from the spectators
To the victor a wooden sword.

From the imperial box
We heard of the revolt at Praeneste
Some gladiators had escaped
And we were displeased with the hirers-out of that show
We were watching,
Such unsatisfactory fighters,
Such poor, spindly, emaciated warriors,

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Where is the fighting?
Where is the grimness of life and death?
And we forced them on with flails and hot irons
As is the custom with reluctant gladiators everywhere.
Even the wild beasts were sluggish—
The virgins uncompliant,
The lions, weeping the tears of sloth,
Dozed in the sand, head between their paws,
And the virgins' garments fluttered in the sand,
And they, the prey, hands tied behind backs,
Did not even scream.
On! On! With whips and red-hot flails!
The crowd is booing; it is beginning to rain,
I shall be drenched in the imperial box,
The absurdity of the gladiatorial parade which opened the show,
The salutations,
These sorry, whining, pitiful specimens
Let them be fed, let the gladiators
Grow fat, before they are dragged to execution,
The rain drips through the soggy awnings.

We are displeased
At this notice that our amusements
May be curtailed
Because of this outbreak at Praeneste.
And today, under the Empire,
There is no Crassus to outfox them,
No Pompey to hold them in.
Spartacus himself used slaves' crosses,
Raised *patibula*, and watched the wretches writhe.
He recognized the necessity of discipline,
Of the quarries and mines,
Of the Empire for labor,
For the working of large estates.
He was himself an imperialist.
And so we hung them, Crassus' triumph,
Every fifty paces, on the road to Rome,
Through the farms they had cultivated
On their crosses,

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The slaves' crosses, *patibula*,
A wedge of wood, transverse,
And a post of wood, upright, beneath it,
And thongs, not nails,
And no water, else they last for days,
The agony is intense
This was before the Christian sect
And the establishment of the Empire,
For every fifty paces on the road to Rome
Twenty thousand
Through the farms they would also have cultivated
Had they won,
Had Spartacus been their Master,
Not Rome,
He being a true imperialist,
A man of the times.
Today we burn them.

But I digress in history
When the established fact
Is that the games are bad,
That they have been put on at our expense,
That these sorry animals hacking at each other with blades
Are not warriors, but curs served up from the dregs of the prisons
and the debtors' lists
Not properly purchased at the mart in Delos
And trained, as at our great school at Praeneste,
In leg irons,
And now the news reaches us
That there is no more school,
That the best have broken loose
And liberated the worst
And they all march forth
Upon the countryside
In armed bands.

Even our philosophers condone the practice
In that it accustoms the people, from earliest age,
To scenes of suffering and death,

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And consequently of courage.
The courage of the arena.
I can see that in their faces.
There is a type of courage, called the courage of the arena.
It is the courage of slaves.

How did it all start?
How are we bound up in this?
We must have more games, more examples of courage,
Better training schools.
I cannot have these gladiators at large.

There is a twittering in the lower octaves
Of the electronic register
And abstractly produced noises
Sputter forth from the tulip-curved horn
Of the speaker,
An artifact,
And the cabinet trembles and tremors
Violate the shade of the sanctuary
That surrounds our living room.

O let the children stop
Their endless game of horse and rider
Of gallop and chase
Of pistol and lariat,
Buckskin breeches, renegade priests,
The Bishop has ordained his hour too,
Robed in violet flame
And from his hairy eyes
You see all Truth
As the Empress learned it at Rasputin's knee.

Females twitch at spiritual excitements
Communicated through electronic horns
Tulip-shaped—
Hairless, virile mouths
Commute ecstasies
Of Santa Teresa in the mountains

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In whispers
To trembling, violent females
Shackled to stove and home.
Feel thrills? Up and down your fleshy female backs
The words of the Bishop rise and writhe.
And the Cardinal sits erect, on his throne,
Red and visible to the masses.

The ancient rituals persist,
The endless whispering of the horn.
Off? Off? We can never turn it off.
I would hear a Presbyterian missionary
Describe his ordeals,
A Jesuit, a Rabbi his persecutions,
An organist, fresh from the wilds of Africa,
Lecture us on sanctity.
Hospitals. Prisons.
Who lectures on sanity?
Horace, Cato, Thucydides,
What voices are raised?
Are we all in the *latomie*,
The quarried stone pits of the Syracusans,
Where the Athenians died?
We describe struggles in Confederate camps,
The race relations of pubescent maidens in towers above the Park—
These prisons are below ground
With their roofs open to air,
Look up! Look up!
I defy you
To find sanity in the land.
Holiness, greed, avarice, hunger,
We are but the instruments of our desires.
Something without propels us,
Something comes through without wires.

Waiting, waiting, in the long twilight,
For the hour of the favorite program,
For the cracked comedian, the perverted dancer,

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The twisted sobbing of minds,
The insane gibber of a moron's mouth—
Once a year
We celebrate Christmas
To the tune of electric bells.
There are not enough castrated choruses
For more than a hundred choirs.
The hooks, the fishhooks in the hands—
Slash the trees—
Open the pines—
Let the resin flow.
The sap of youth.

Armies are assembled
On draft principles
And sent out, improperly trained,
To remote destinations.
The waves come through the ether
And illuminate their photo-draped bunks.
Home is where you find it.
Literature swells
Across the seas
By millions, brightly colored
And figured, fantastic adventures,
And our forests are denuded
That our soldiers may be fed.

And the mind feeds, in silence,
In the long Arctic nights, in bunks,
And the night light burns
And the brightly colored pages
Flip in short, blunt fingers
And the whole world becomes a screen,
Lit up, for a moment, in a vast illumination
That blanks the screens
And in that universal devastation of white
White white white
We all become white
From the horror of what we see, between flashes,

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Lit up stupendous, on the sky,
Escaping, blanking, on and off, out and on,
From our screens
Leaping in vast auroras, blank, and blind,
To leap and leap
Above above
And it all goes out
In a vast twinkle
Without an eye
And where you are
Is a white powder.

Gladiators no more,
There has been a universal death
And your combats are no longer required.
The imperial box is shut, is not a box,
Is a powder
And the imperial screens, which framed that box,
Have gone down into dust
And the whole crumbled arena
Can be held in one hand,
Along with the human bones
It shed.

O I ask nothing
Here on the verge of the arena,
And the vast horizon blinks out and on,
On and off
The vast illuminations lighting up the sky like rain
Like long falling, plangent blades of rain,
So cool, so bright,
Killing us,
In the arena of the heart—
No more bullfights—
Blades into the soft tissue
No more blood
The Sacred Heart has burst.
The Sacred Heart has burst.

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JOHN R. MARVIN

Above the Burning Plain

1

In a mist that filled the remote valley beyond Dolores and encircled the mountain peaks—cone and crater—like delicate coronas, two men, Indians of the Tarahumaras, stooped over a fresh grave. The younger man, a *yowame* healer with a fine skull and wide, lidless eyes, stood up, flipped the serape over his shoulder and faced the older man, a pure-blood with an immense, powerful torso, narrow hips, and eyes in which there was something at once judicious, jolly, and cruel. But in the younger man's expression there was nothing but reserve and mockery. It was the third grave in two days (twelve had died of the fever). The Indian priest from the pueblo had just driven away down the rocky ravine, leaving them to the filling. Now, all that remained was this and the empty earthen pot before the second row of huts where a badger had feasted in the night and brought new life to that dead soul.

For a time neither man spoke, respectful of the silence, and there was no movement except for the white goats that grazed in the sparse grass near the graves, near the circlets of stones which enclosed the mounds.

At last the healer, Luna, took out a pipe and lighted it with precision. His lip was drawn up in a perpetual smile which he could not control; the mark of some olden thing, the womb or palsy, it lent a rue to the delicacy and grace of his manner.

"It is outlanders' fever." Luna spoke in dialect. "A disease of the pig-people. Mexicano or Americano! I hear of it often. There is no cure."

The large Indian, Gaucho, the leader, the *seri-ga-me,* turned toward the mist and sun, his hands folded over his rounded chest; his look was glittering, lucid, perspicuous.

"The disease is passing," he said finally. "The passing-ness is our cure."

Luna regarded him with the half-mockery of his eyes, the changeless pathos of his smile.

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"What do you believe, Gaucho? That all evil will come and go? Let me tell you! The pig-men steal more than the body. They steal the breath of our souls!" He spat the words from his lips. "They walk regardless over the dead souls. That is evil. *Chati! Chati!*"

Gaucho gazing downward did not answer. Presently, he turned almost away from the *yowame,* occupied with the sights around him, the huts where most of the people were withdrawn in dread, the two or three gasoline-driven vehicles, two open cars and a truck, which sat idle and ugly like tarantulas in the clearing, and the distant sunset up the barranca. For a moment, the past seemed less to him than an echo, and he confronted only change. The young men still raced on the mountains, fearless as pumas, and the rivers had not dried—yet there was danger, like a whirlwind, everywhere. The deer, the *chomari,* were vanishing quickly, hunted into that past, the reachless place, by white men with guns. First in his mind now was the certain man, the lone Americano called Tate, who lived just over the first ridge of mountains in the heart of the deer-land and would not leave. Once, he, Gaucho, had nursed that man's illness—the spotted fever—and had suffered him to remain in the mountains. And there were others—the destroyers, the people of the whirlwind. Yet high above the changing world, watchful of the future, hovered the sun, Dios, while over the night the holy mother of God shone like the new moon. Only, there was the danger, and as he turned back to the younger man, after his long gaze, he felt the soul within him return again to the earth, to the stone. He spoke suddenly.

"We will deal soon with the lone Americano."

Luna had knelt in the sand, his hand gracefully tracing in it the design of a stag.

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Yes, we will go tomorrow, and then it will not be long to wait."

Luna arose in the darkening air, and they stood together, silent, communal, while across from them a few people came out of the huts, men and women who awaited them. The crying of an infant, borne on the troubled air, came to Gaucho's ears as he stood with head uplifted, immense and cruelly judicious in the sunset.

"You will come to my hut for a cup of *tesguino,*" Luna said. "To honor the dead and the living. Adiosi."

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Gaucho remained a moment speculative in the cold time between day and night. Then he moved in his singular, earth-bound way toward the people, toward the light.

2

The day dawned like quicksilver over a mere of winter mud and frost where Colin Tate stood alone between his haphazard camp and the ruins of an old monastic dwelling. He had first viewed the mildewed stones ten years ago, after his discharge from the war, and yesterday they had recalled him keenly to an earlier, distinct self, a tall young man with hair like sand who had inherited money and came here first as tourist but stayed on as hunter and occasional guide, with memories enough of mankind. From then to now, he had lived in freedom, sometimes in terror, but away from the wrack of things.

Tate watched the sunrise, crouching his body slightly and rising to relieve the cramps of the night; though the cold was bitter, it was dry, bodiless. Then his figure in the rabbit-lined surcoat became as still as the pines. His body had the slenderness of a tree, lithe, variously supple; his manner was immersed, almost rapt. Tate felt a constriction in his chest and though he hacked and spat he could not clear it; it was more than physical —it was a hatred for the flesh, for the world which had contrived his body like live bait for human devils to gnaw.

Turning, he looked at the scattered cinders of the fire, and then at the lump of blankets where the cheek and eyes of the girl, the newcomer, were visible. She was awake—her pale eyes watched him, unabashed and carnal. She was not pretty, could never have been, and he felt about her some human taint, deep as earth-mold. He looked away from her and found himself wanting to see nothing but the gilded mist around him. He knew himself well, at least what he felt: a closeness to the woods, sometimes a oneness with the power that infused them, the only knowable thing, the purity. He recalled now moments of splendor in which nature and man, the flesh itself, had turned to nothing, and he viewed, alone, a different, changeless world of truth and passion, a world of his own. But these were visions only of the man he might become, and they always faded.

At last, he knelt at the fire to rebuild it.

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Tate was conscious of himself, whatever he did. He worked at the sticks and matches with rapt calmness. Once he paused to glance up at the dark crest of the mountains and then around him at the dawn-glimmering woods; like himself derelict and athirst for life, they were signs also, ciphers which he read by the various lights of his mind. He had made the discovery long ago; the truth lay not in the reason alone—it came to him often in a dream or a wish, sometimes from remote distances within him or without, so that as he seized it, he could not be certain whether he waked or slept.

Then Tate's attention became fixed to the glowing twigs. For that reason, he did not notice as the man, Lilywhite, rose from the blankets beside the girl and slouched toward the fire, his beard muddied where he had slept on his cheek, his eyes bleared with the need for warmth.

Tate only felt the cold when he jerked up to find Lilywhite huddled there, his arms flung across his body, like a weasel at bay. Unmoved, Tate considered the vain, rude mind of the man and the strength of the red, fat hands—they intervened between him and the man's stolen money which Tate must have in order to survive, to remain here, at least in freedom from man, now that the winter and the Indians were joined against him. Yet now, as he thought of it—death, his own or any man's—he felt its unreality against the greenness of time. Tate felt himself blown by contrary winds, but he had learned to move with them.

The acrid, heatless smoke rose from the damp twigs while he remained motionless, musing. Then Lilywhite dropped abruptly to his knees and hovered over the fire. The paper lay like foil on the coals, so he poked it, and the smoke poured through and then a tiny lip of flame. He thought of the girl, half-sister to the man; they had been farmers, then factory workers in Illinois before they seized the money and wandered across Mexico into these hills. They were used to certain things—while he had learned to live by nature, the round, the changeful dance.

Tate, still without speaking, lifted the iron frame and set it over the fire; he placed the coffee pot half full of grounds over that. The man stood in the azure cold shaking violently, his joints knotted, his mouth a blue blur, watching the mocking decorum of Tate's gestures.

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"God A'mighty," the man said emptily; the flames beat on the coffee pot.

Rising, Tate looked at the man crouched there, and he smiled. He glanced down at the lump under the blankets; then he moved toward the packs on the ruins. He walked past the burros which had up-risen and were browsing in the frost and stubble with the panicked quietness of hunger. Then he lifted the first pack from the ruins, staring down a moment at the moss and lichen on the hewn stones, the obliteration, the disease of time. Returning, Tate towered over the burros, removing the bag, pouring it now into two round troughs, and he placed the troughs side by side in a little furrow of mud. The burros came without hurry or hesitation, their little black eyes languid with desire, and began softly nuzzling the barley. Behind the burros' heads the sun showed its edge and smote suddenly the wide valley.

Tate, who had never quite stopped moving, took up the bucket with its skin of ice in the bottom and moved down the creekside. In the ivy were bright tin cans, bottles, armors of lust from an American's summer camp. He clambered up a black boulder and struck the bucket savagely against the shell of ice until it fell through into the swift water and vanished like dust. He filled the bucket laboriously, his lips thin with anguish of hunger, and regained the bank. But he stopped moving when he saw the trail of a puma in the mud.

Then, in the boughs of a cliffside tree he saw the lion, waiting, writhing, nervously couchant, the bleached eyes overviewing him. He had no time to reflect or retreat.

It lunged at once, obliquely, disappearing in the forest-track; but he knew its mind, a man-eater, and what its haunts would be since it had tasted man. A feeling leaped inside Tate, as if for a moment he felt the scent of the puma, its bloody spoor, cling to the cusps of his brain.

After it passed, he remembered many times mimicking a beast's mind and discovering it to himself—the discovery left always a dew of sweetness somewhere within him. But this had come too soon, stunning him, like a visitation, and as he turned away slowly he felt he could not quite cancel from his memory some trace of the beast—its formless fear.

He carried the pail to the fire. Ahead of him he saw that the

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girl had risen and was kneeling beside the man, her hands thrust almost into the blaze. Then the man rose, his face broken, scarred with anxiety.

"For God's sake, hurry!" he screamed. "I can't . . . can't stand another night!"

Around that scream the silence of the morning closed swiftly like water upon sound. Anger throbbed inside Tate, and yet he moved ceaselessly up to the fire, placed the pail there, and returned to the packs to fetch food. He knew that the man feared more than the night, feared him, Colin Tate, with the frenzy of a man craven of death. But Tate, walking in the frost through the sunlight, was thinking only of the hazards of the day.

He spent some time stooped over the packs, sorting and taking from them the last round of ham which he had saved for nearly six months, always promising himself a feast when game was scarce or waters frozen. The time had come to use it, and a deer would have to die in some bitter encounter to replenish him. He lifted and cinched the other pack to the nearest burro. Then he took a basin from the pack and a worn bar of soap, noticing that the raw cut on his knuckles had begun to infect where he had twice struck the man when the man tried to resist his help. Three days had passed since he came upon the wrecked truck and saw the woman in the river, while he was wandering in search of a dry cave or a new site for a cabin. It was two weeks after the Indians burned down the cabin; and what he remembered now from the scene three days ago was the way the man only sat in a puzzle of abstract fear without moving—a thief lost on a high plateau among indeterminable Indian roads—while the girl waded thigh-deep in the chill water of the mudlick, as if unaware of danger. He remembered the smile on her up-curved lips, the way, looking at him, she dropped her skirts so that they floated in a kind of glee on the waters near the overturned truck.

Then, the next day, Lilywhite offered half of the money in return for Tate's help and guessed too late that Tate must have all of it.

He was still daubing turpentine on the knuckles, pondering, when he caught the motion behind him.

He spun, but it was only the girl, close to him this time, her homely face with the nose that was not straight and the eyes that

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were not quite symmetrical. She was smiling at him, a smile that was salacious, awry, yet steady, so that it held him.

"We'll be down soon," he said. "I know you spent a bad night. The nights are cold here, winter or summer."

She showed again no appreciation of Tate's sympathies.

"I slept poorly," she said. "But I was looken at the fire, see'n fancies till it went down. Do you ever lay awake staren into fires to watch the burnen?"

Tate tightened the last cinch of the second burro, struck by a quality in her, a simplicity.

"Not lately," he said. "Not since boyhood." His voice was deep, unusual in tone, like a slightly solemn music. "I look for things that fire or air can't burn."

Without glancing at her, he trod back to the fire, carrying the victuals, while she followed him as fleetly as a shadow. Before the fire the man knelt as if in a spell of dreaming, his hands joined, the smear of mud drying along his cheek, like plaster.

"It's hard to think you was ever a boy," her husky voice said. "With your fashion of strangeness."

"Yes, it's something I . . . don't care to remember."

She was with him this way, a persistent, irreconcilable shadow, not bright, not clear in mind, but with some dense, balanced intelligence or will that was like any woman's, yet directed singly to him as if somehow expectant, as if this expectancy were new to her and nearly objectless.

She followed him all the way back to the burros the second time, catching up with him as Tate lighted his pipe, just as he hacked again at the lump in his chest. Looking down, he met the grave attention of her gaze, and turning away in his decorous manner, he felt a huge tenderness for her as for an animal, which was broken only by the depth of his own habits.

"You know . . . Colin . . . Mr. Tate, I esteem you more than Tom."

Tate beheld her, the keen smoke mantling the gray of his eyes, reflective, almost rapt, yet courteous, ruthful.

"You go back to the fire and tend it," he said. Bending, he took up the pans and food with deeper weariness. He had put off the time too long because of her; now he would have to hurry—he hoped to reach a road or come near enough to the Indian country

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so that she would be safe before the man, rendered desperate, would scheme and strike.

Then as Tate looked up from slicing the meat he saw the spiral of smoke far down the valley which he must traverse, like a tall white plume, blurred by distance.

Tate watched the smoke rise an instant as if it were in another country, and yet he knew it was for him. Down there near the volcanic lake, the Indians awaited him; they had burned his cabin two weeks ago, and since he had not left, they had come for him.

Tate stood still a moment, held between dismay and awe. It had been very long, he knew, since these Indians, isolated from the world's rage, had tracked a man down; yet he understood well the difference that marked him: a rejection of their brotherhood which would have justified his presence on their land, and an affair with one of the women which came to nothing, had enraged them. He knew their first intention, to force him back up the slope, there to starve slowly if once he turned in fear. But suddenly he could not think why *he* was here amidst the terror, he alone out of all the world—and yet in some closed place of his mind he felt he had dimly foreknown it, guessed or dreamed it.

Jennie Lilywhite came to his side and stood unknowing beside him.

"I could help you . . ." she whispered. "I'm not bad-natured. It was him—fuddled me—with his lovesickness!"

Without speaking to her, he walked back, she following, the air becoming by contrast with the sun colder, more indefinite than the quicksilver had been. Hope was something in Tate's mind that resembled regret. The danger of the coming night blent strangely with his hate and care for life, and with the meaning of the tall column of pine-smoke down the valley.

He saw the man, Lilywhite, but he was like most men, not quite a man, rising, staring at him and then at the girl following him. Tate felt nearly a pity for him, for all the adverse, empty beings from New York to Reno who drifted through the Sierras. Life was in the man again now, shown not so much in the glitter of his eyes as in the way he looked down at the girl's body when Tate passed, in the vicious way his hand clutched her wrist.

"There!" the man said wildly. "You let her be! She ain't yours. She ain't bright enough to know what I done for her. I stole for her . . ."

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Tate turned by instinct, in outrage. His palm struck squarely, half-pityingly on the man's upturned face. Lilywhite toppled forward across the fire, screamed, and sprawled back. Then he covered his eyes with his lacerated, blackened hands.

3

Nearly oblivious now to the shaft of smoke which was in some way too real, in another way too dream-like to contemplate or hold in his mind, Tate began to drive the burros through the pass, across a mossy paddock veined by innumerable rills. Behind him, the man and girl walked hand in hand, driven together by his indifference or by the man's lechery and fear. Ahead of him, the golden beauty opened up as he had seen it three weeks ago on his way back to the cabin (which a week later burned in his sight)—the gold and silver tones of winter which, like the waterfalls and silent arbors, were as close as he had ever come to what he liked, though he had known plenitude and had lain with women who acquainted him with tenderness and all its human woe. The lucent mesas, the long descending alleys of fir and white pine, the route of snow-clouds occupied him, not as an end (they held no promise of Paradise and were mortal like himself) but as affinities, characters which told him who he was and where he was going.

Then, as Tate paused, looking downward, he felt it come again, swiftly, above or outside thought—a change in himself and what he saw, a fullness of vision.

He stood a moment emptied of everything but it: something infinitely shared or simply latent in himself, a glory, a purity within him; and skies, woods, flesh, seemed for one instant transcended, shaped only by his desires and memories—while a true, an eternal passion, radiance, and joy filled him.

Tate stood a moment on the cliff while the feeling, the transient revelation receded, aware again, but in a slightly different way, nearly without pain, almost with innocence, of the life around him and of his own scheme. Then, as he stared downward, he viewed with a new awe the tall spire of smoke, which was ineradicable, which was death itself.

Tate felt terror reach inward as far as his bones. Turning, he glimpsed with despair his single shadow, long and spectral, gnarled by the shape of the rocks.

Time had shifted into mid-morning, and he walked on slowly

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as before, down the deer-trail which wound over a cliff-side sheer almost as a gorge. The man and woman followed painfully, with fearful care, at a distance, and in the silence, intricate with beauty and malice, he was held by the memory of himself: a young man with a shrapnel wound in his right thigh, unattached except to a small insurance firm in Houston and to the Summer School at which he took the hard courses, aware of what the others did not see, the univalence of thought: its hypocrisy, willed of the flesh. Angry and wet with pain, but with a sweetness and rue inside him, he had come on vacation, half by accident, half by design, to this green world, and never returned.

Tate, ruminating, felt his mind twitch among dreads: the wisps of smoke, and memories more profound than they . . .

In the solitude broken only by infrequent journeys to the *pueblo* or to Dolores he made a cabin, a sheeling of bark and white pine wet with resin; he cut withes to tie the timber, built bowers for the nestlings and a corral for the burros, while his mind blent with the forms, the sheens around him. He had nearly forgotten man, the treachery and terror of which the deep red well in his thigh was the brand, and he sought what he saw as the seasons wheeled. But then everything altered: a thought came between him and the nude world—his eyes and hands sought something they did not find, something at first like a dream, an attitude, beyond the casual, the particular dawn and the evil in himself which arose as soon as he reflected. Then he fell sick, and it was evening filled with a dust-storm around the gloomy, makeshift huts.

"Will you help me?" he seemed to ask the man Gaucho. "I'm not a hunter and I'm dying."

The queer earthy eyes watched him with pity and amusement, as if savoring the lie.

"You are a seru-ame (fish-hunter) then."

Around him in the dusty air men and women tittered with low laughter, hostile and yet half tender, ubiquitous to his feverish gaze.

"Come into my hut, hombre. Women will care for you." He was held from collapsing by several strong arms. "You see we watch you often on the mountain . . . we see that you often kill."

First in the shimmer of the fever and then through long, quiet days odorous with cedar fires, he remained with them, struck not by anything they did, but by their society, the customs and crafts

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of their minds which were nature's and not-nature's—the subtle fissure caused by knowledge and intimations of evil. He stayed for five months, nearly out of civility; but eventually he saw without faith what they beheld: the soul-tie of man with weasel and heron, the god-sends in the stones and bushes, and winds and locusts with the souls, the wits of furies. And there was no freedom from this, the slow, circular dance of man and nature, death and life, which were partners and always interchangeable, held fast together by the everlasting groin. Tate felt it drawing him—and yet he knew the danger in this beauty which beckoned him, the loss of sublimity, and he knew there must be another way of seeing, his own and no other.

The large copper-skinned man named Gaucho sat in the doorway wearing a blue-denim shirt bleached to whiteness, looking at him.

"You should stay among us . . . friend. Out there . . . (he gestured toward the hills) . . . you are not welcome to us."

"No, I have to leave." He tried to express in jargon his desire to be apart.

A look of amusement, jestingness, or scorn filled the huge face.

"Then go far! Leave our country. For the sake of God!"

Back on the mountainside, he half forgot the wrong, their hatred, the months of doubt; and he felt the difference—his vision deepened by the freedom, the finality of choice. He was alone now, past temptation or regret, and he felt for the first time the wholeness and glory above all things.

Now, in the noon sunlight, Tate flicked the burros' flanks with his hawthorn goad, conscious again of the continual smoke, troubled suddenly by a puzzle in the day or in himself—a wish or a fear that the Indians might somehow prevent his plan, the seizure of Lilywhite's loot with which he half hoped to bribe them for his life.

He descended the path more slowly now, watching the spire of smoke ascend away from the trees on the left. They were waiting for him this time—he had lived among them all these years and nothing remained now but this wrongness, the scent of terror which in some way fearing, he seemed, strangely, almost to welcome.

Then there came the sound of loose pebbles flying and the man stumbled down the path beside him.

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Tate, without turning, looked at Lilywhite. The man was alive now that the cold was broken, but his eyes were brutal with worry. Tate knew that he was thinking of the Indians too, the tower of smoke within a mile of the path.

"Them's Indians," the man said finally. "I've been watchen."

Tate observed the man. There was a note of gladness behind the fear in Lilywhite's voice, and he knew that Lilywhite hated and feared him more than he feared the mountains and the Indians: he could not tell that Tate would never attack first, since he himself had no creed. The Indians, the man felt, were his last hope, if only he could come near them.

"Yes, Indians," Tate said. "They're Tarahumaras. They hate trespassers, outlanders."

Tate saw how the half-truth struck the man hopeless. For himself, there was only the memory of three weeks ago as he passed through their village with supplies, while from broken door-stoops they watched him silently. But as he rode by, he had seen the woman run up to the healer, Luna, and speak rapidly; it was the same woman of three years ago whom he had found abandoned after Mexicans sullied her, and he had been kind to her until spring opened up the pass—but he could not keep her. He had not loved her body and only in a moment of emptiness had once embraced her indifferently. He had not done this against her will, but he had forced her to return; he had taken her back at night and ridden away from her hatred. And at first he wondered why she had waited three years until he chanced to pass the village—perhaps she had concealed from everyone his part in the matter until his sudden reappearance outraged her. It was strange that in some way he did not foresee, even then, the burnt cabin fired by their rapid runners a day before he reached it. And yet he was not certain. Had he really known it all, from the beginning?—from the killing of the first deer?

He felt suddenly Lilywhite's hand touch his shoulder.

"Tate . . . listen, Tate!" The man spoke dazedly. "I want to pay you for helpen! I'm willen to pay half . . . or more!"

Tate walked on. "Forget it, man."

Lilywhite was earnest, genuine with fear, his face illumined by something that remained in him, after the factory, of a farmer's chivalry, some impossible mixture of selfishness and honor.

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"I did wrongly to Jennie," he said, gasping aloud. "I was drunk the first time and then . . . she ain't really a sister! You might have her now. Take all my goods! Jist let me go down yonder—rid of everything!"

Tate smiled and struck the man's shoulder—something between a caress and a blow. "Maybe that's what I should do."

"That's right!" The man peered at him with wild earnestness. Then he seemed to understand Tate's mockery, that all the words of man were charged with it, and the light fell from his gaze. Tate felt this, and in a certain way he sympathized; but that did not change the fact that the man possessed what he needed, what the mountains had never given him, at least often enough so that he could survive. Yet the man's life depended not on him, Colin Tate, but upon his own fear and on the natural struggle that must follow.

His mouth agape, frantic, the man fell behind as they turned the path within sight of the lake, a tarn pine-bordered and ice-filmed in the sunlight, far below. But he did not forget the man now; he knew that Lilywhite felt he had lost two chances, the chance that the Indians might be saviors, and the chance to bribe which would make Tate the hunted man. He did not look backward, but his ears were attuned to every sound extraneous to the steady plod of the burros.

Then something—a bright and mocking shade—passed Tate's mind. He seemed to glimpse himself in a new way: a form made of unalterable difference and oneness, spirit and flesh intangibly knotted, as if the soul of man had fleshed itself out of necessity and love. The idea seemed not to come from him, nor quite from the Indians—but to exist immaculate, everywhere around him. His mind turned quickly in denial. But as he descended the hillside, it left on his memory a doubt, a faery vestige of pain.

4

He had just reached the steep deer-path over the last bluff when he detected the sound. But he did not turn. He merely felt the closeness of death and, again, something between terror and yearning. Then he heard the man close behind him, not silent, an awkward, stumbling figure with bursting lungs.

He whirled instantly, drawing the knife from the sheath at his

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belt. The man loomed for a second, a large white astonished face, the club uplifted. And Tate stepped forward and twisted the knife in his heart. He felt the heavy heart-throb on the steel.

Tate leaned over the body for an instant, contemplative and awed. There came a mystery over everything—over the faces of the man dying and the girl staring at him—as if they like him were transposed utterly into a timeless woods among memories like amaranth. And Tate, hovering, felt a grief, even for this man, divide him momentarily from all intention.

Abruptly, he plunged forward, and the girl only stood there, as he knelt swiftly beside the man and began to tear the shirt away from the spreading blood. He disengaged the knife in order to cut the leather thong which held the money-pouch, and the warm blood smoked over his fingers. The man was still talking, a kind of doomed, childlike chatter. Then quickly, the man was silent, dead, and the face assumed a pose, a guise like a clown's vizard.

Tate thrust the money-pouch in his mackinaw, his manner merely intent, weary. He glanced toward the girl, and he saw her eyes fixed upon him with a quietness keener than admiration, and marred with pain.

"It was like . . . what I dreamt once," she whispered, as if awakening to him, to the dead man, and herself. "But I never believed it could be."

Tate clutched the spade from the donkey's side—he tried to hurry as from a nightmare toward light and freedom.

"Don't think of him," Tate said to her. "Dying is part of a man."

He reeled a little with fatigue, but his fingers held firm to the shovel as he moved to a wet spot in the earth near the path. The girl walked over to the dead man and looked down at the blood, her body rigid as if violated. Tate glanced at her, his mouth broken with an irony that was both grief and indifference, and plunged the spade into the wet, virgin sod. He plunged the spade again and again. And he felt in each motion of his hands a futility, a human triviality, an action without design.

For a while, she stood beside him, watching him dig the token grave. Then without speaking again, she backed away and wandered into the near forest, into the complete silence in which no pine cone stirred. He paused from his exertions, listening for

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her, but she was dainty by nature and had gone far from him, to hide her sickness.

Moments later, he had finished working a shallow grave in the turf and went to carry the body there. The blood was huge—it gushed over Lilywhite and lay in visceral lakes. Tate dropped the man in the pit with a sigh of weariness and kicked dirt on the face.

Then the girl ran out. She ran with a scream, a wail that tore open the pure silences, and flung herself headlong into the grave.

When he was through, he was too tired to press on. He drove the burros away from the scene of death, the girl following, and sat on a hillock of grass. He tried not to think: thinking had not made the mountains or his own freedom, and freedom was not a thought. But the thinking would not stop: it told him that he was not a killer, that at any time the man could have stolen away or failed to strike—it told him of the freshness after violent storms, the law of the conquering lion, how these deaths sweetened life. Yet he knew it was not his reason that killed—it was the force he had become, what his desires made him; it was an act of his own being. If there was mockery in this, infamy, it lay solely in the flesh.

He tried not to look at the girl kneeling like stone. There was the forest and it could not betray. He looked into the hues of amber and green as into familiars. But as he looked, he felt the presence—the same as twice before but in a new shape—interpose like a naked thought. It was the possibility of error. It seemed to him now that the trees, the hidden beasts had become watchers, but ghostly with a betrayal not their own, bereft of any mind and of all verity. A near despair clutched his eyes.

Suddenly, as the dream passed, he saw in the green gap of trees, half a mile down, five figures who looked steadily toward him, then withdrew into the dense brake. He knew now that they wanted him to come down alone, else, seeing him, they would not have waited. As he looked downward, he felt no greater fear than before, only the swift apprehension of another wrong, deeper even than the doubt.

For that time, all was stillness over the lake and among the pines. Then the girl came up swiftly and sat down near him in the dry grass.

He saw that she was not crying, but was watching him—as the

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Indian girl had used to do, with the same quality of despair, hate, and love. What did she see when she looked at him, Tate wondered—a tall man with sharp features, traces of gray in his sandy hair, who had failed her. That was probably all that such women ever saw when their minds opened. He was still a man to her, a child also, and all she recognized of God. It seemed to him that he understood suddenly the old original ill between man and woman—and now he did not care . . .

"There's no use going on now," Tate said to her. "I'm going down alone. They're waiting for me."

A sweetness and rue came into his eyes, like a shadow.

"Likely, I won't be back. Now listen. It's not bad being with Indians a while. They pay a courtesy to women. Ask them to take you with them, and not let you freeze or starve."

She looked at him a moment with her new intelligence, new despair. Then her face broke, and she grieved in the quiet way that was homely and steady, without lowering her eyes from his face.

But she stopped soon, still gazing at him.

"I'll do what you tell me," she said. "It won't matter where I go. It'll always be the same. Only you're the one I'll remember."

He thought then: why should he have been the one to awaken her!

"No man's worth a memory," Tate said.

He arose in the sunlight and walked steadily, as he was accustomed to do at all times, down the path toward the lake. The heavy forests contained Indians whose hatred he knew, and he did not wish to get as far as the lake before they struck.

Then, as he walked, he began to realize that the Indians had always been waiting—their power of death—and in some way he had been waiting too. They would come for him—their poverty, disease, and fear would make them strike at him, the scapegoat, the victim. A grandeur grew in him greater than he had known—he felt a perfect death within him, transforming all their grief and hate into light, into deliverance, for them and himself.

Then he saw the Indian, Gaucho, standing in the path, the immense round shoulders and oblong head, a skin almost purely gold in the haze.

Tate walked to him and stopped.

"*Dios Kuira,* Tate," the Indian said gravely, quietly.

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Tate could feel the others, invisible among the trees, listening.

"You know I wouldn't leave, Gaucho," Tate said. "I've never run away."

The Indian shrugged. He looked at Tate with eyes in which there was pride, cruelty, and something immensely jolly.

"We never hurry, friend. Should we?" he asked. He spoke in Mexican. "We burnt the cabin—but we knew you would come back."

"All right, Gaucho," he said with sudden fury. "You will *have* to kill me!"

The Indian's great torso hovered before him; the black eyes under the splotch of blacker hair expressed his regret and mirth.

"You are Tate," Gaucho said. "You have had a dream. A lone man dreams often. We have known you all the years. We will only . . . take the woman."

In the long hush, Tate faced the Indian. He understood quickly—only he could not believe. He drew the money-pouch from his mackinaw.

"Here's all I have," he said. "Take me and this. But treat the girl well."

The Indian did not change expression. Abruptly, he turned and walked away into the forest.

Tate was left alone, braced against a yellowing birch tree.

Somewhere, back up the trail, the Indians had discovered the new grave—he heard their outcries. Yet the grave only confirmed what they already knew. Silence returned, and looking up instinctively, he saw the Indians disappear into the walls of silence. He felt that those walls would not open again for him, as on all sides the trees, bereaved, bent their green vision upon him.

Stricken by change, Tate stood still, while emptiness—a perfection, green and void of heart and thought—sped through him like an ichor. What he had been he no longer knew or what he had seen that was not a dream.

To his ears, out of the stillness, came the cry of the sparrow hawk, the mew of the puma, errant and chthonic with distance.

Tate whirled suddenly as if to escape extinction, but his face struck against the yellow wet leaves, so that, as he stood there rooted, mindless—without desire or hope—the dew left on his cheeks a travesty of tears.

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HERBERT GOLD

Fiction of the Fifties

1. *The writer as metaphysician*

INDEED IT IS DIFFICULT not to live cautiously these days. There is so much to gain (car, house, rank); there is so much to lose (rank, house, car). And yet, what we are sure of gaining and sure of losing remains the same. We are sure of losing our lives. We are sure of the chance at gaining our lives. The ceremonial observances of passion and joy, regret and renewal, continue as always. Parents die, children are born, lovers meet and cling to each other, "their arms round the griefs of the ages." Days pass. Age comes. Mortality decides much and yet gives us many choices: *What are we to make of our lives?* Each step of the way, bound to instinct and accident, controlled by the past and by those others who surround us, involves a new decision: *In what direction the next step?* We are left with this peculiar good news in the shape of a question; by asking it we earn the right of eminent domain. In spite of the way of the world, we utter our hopes, we challenge our fears, we take our chances: *What next? When? Where? How? Why?*

These ultimate questions are contained within every act a man or a woman performs; they have always been contained within the act of creation which is the writing of a story. This has been true for ever and ever, and was true during the decade of the Fifties.

A fly in the metaphysics has been growing, however, until it has near reached the size of a bounding Australian kangaroo. Is it *we* who decide? Who decides under the humid breath of the mass media, psychologizing preachers, statesmen of clay and lanolin made—under that interior whisper to belong, conform, and R.I.P.? Who decides about modern war, atomic fission, mass murder? We are in the shoes of the man poised on the edge of the cliff, deciding about life and mortality, who finally sighs and turns away, resolute against suicide. He will live! There is only one chance for a man, and it is here on earth! . . . At that moment he is shot in the chest by a mad sniper.

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Therefore the writer, that exemplary figure, that scapegoat with a diet of tin and hope, scampering first in the lead and then in the rear of society, must accept a complicated mission. He must bounce along with the busy-rumped kangaroo. He must celebrate and value experience. He must see clearly. He must relish what he sees. He must make sense. *And he must not forget the snipers.* Sir Graspinghands who chased the grail had no harder task. Only his armor weighed him down — no publishing fads, anonymous reviews, girls asking "Are you happy?", cocktail therapy. He had his horse, his mission, his box of See-rations; "Go!" He went.

In order to balance the impossible burden of this mid-century on his back and head, the writer must be possessed by what is called Style. Style is a notion much worried these and all days. It has to do with controlled strength—the control of the nervous juggler, the strength of the very strong man. It means everything is kept in the air at once, and coherent, and ordered, and eloquent, and also actually *there* in the mind. It is not a scampering trick, a minor felicity, a small device sandpapered into life. An illustration of the power of style is that carnival game which asks you to hammer a nail into a board in three strokes in order to win the prize. The stylist does not bang the board all about; he does not splay his thumb; he hits the nail neatly and swiftly and accurately. Of course, there may be hidden obstructions in the board which deflect the nail; the nail itself may not bear the burden of his stroke; but he fails with dignity and clear sight and a sense of purposeful, directed energy. Also, with good luck in an honest show, he carries off the prize doll.

Style in a writer is a policy about life, not a stunt. It is the personal cabinet of the man who is President of Himself (or at least First Tenor of Egosdale-on-Avon). It is the package containing sealed orders, and when far at sea or in the jungle, we open it, we read these terrible words: *Think about cardinal matters!* It is both the map to treasure and the treasure itself.

Aiming at the truth about life on earth, possessed of his style, what has been the special mission of the writer of fiction during the decade of the 1950's? Not absolutely different from the mission of the writer of any time, of course. One role did not leave off in 1949 when automobiles were just beginning to grow their postwar tumors and television aerials sprouted like wild asparagus on the rooftops of America. But a special kind of light has been

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focussed, a direction marked out, and when we look at the contemporary writers who mean much to us at this end of the decade, we may see how they have responded as a group to the particular disasters and challenges of our time.

We may be made uncomfortable by looking. If we are interested in fiction, we usually want only to embrace it; we hate to see too clearly—it's like examining the piece of spinach on the teeth of the loved one whom we are about to kiss. So let's look quickly, have it over with, and be ready for the kissing. Now here is the spinach:

Writers of fiction have been taking on the role traditionally played by religious leaders, philosophers, metaphysicians. They have returned in deep need to the most primitive poetic purpose: *to know:* to try to know even when they know not: to invoke knowledge: to ransom the god within by peeling off their skin. They have been driven to asking the ultimate questions. And those who love fiction must nowadays love it partly because it concerns itself with final matters.

Where? Whither? Why?

For whom do I live?

For what?

What is the relation between freedom and isolation? When am I free and when am I merely isolated? When am I alone and independent? When am I responsible? When am I groupy, togethered into socialized isolation? When am I selfished into insignificance, savaged into incoherence?

What is the connection between love and weakness, love and strength?

Why do I live, struggle, love, defy age and history?

Why must I die and for what?

Who am I?

This question is the spinach on all our teeth and it stinks up our breath when we utter it. It's not, either, that these concerns are unique to our time—the spinach is still visible on Dostoyevsky's teeth, and Tolstoy filled his mouth with green. The great writer always explores both his inner space and that other world outside his head, and bridges the air between. *There must be coherence,* he insists. An aching personal concern with meaning is the exceptional by-product of our age. Where can we find the

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truth amid the lies which surround us? There is lassitude in our bones and an aching hope in our loins. This is not ordinary spinach: this is Spinach-90.

Naturally the other kinds of writers and readers still exist. Family novels, fat historical romances, suspense and mystery stories, and various partial tale-bearers still have their audiences, and why not? Spinach, harsh and gritty, is not necessarily good for us and some make no demand for it. The impulse toward metaphysics and prophecy is not universal, and why should it be? Also religious leaders, political thinkers, philosophers, psychoanalysts, columnists in *Look,* fortune tellers, revivalists, and drug-sellers all marshal their happy (unhappy) throngs. These citizens have little need to look for thought in fiction, and usually have little need of fiction at all, except for the fiction of self-help.

Having eliminated these good citizens, we are left with you and me and perhaps some cowboy in Butte, Montana, waiting in a library while his MG is repaired. We like to read, you and I and that cowboy. (He is also the child in the second balcony whom the violinist plays for.) We read. We see no way of justifying the ways of men to men except by imaginative examination of life on earth. We have looked for the strong sense of personality (mysteries, style); we have found dilemmas and problems (unsolved, unsolvable); we have found resolutions (impossible, essential); we have occasionally been wrung by that strong response which tells us, in literature and in love, in ourselves or in others, I feel! I am alive! I think; therefore I exist.

All this is not to argue that the story-teller is a mere systematic philosopher, conducting a streetcar named Reality, heading home toward the Truth after a hard day. No, no. The car barn is empty; the streetcars have all been sold to Mexico City; futile to look to tropical paradises of tequila and bee-stung lips or to Rome, or to Moscow, or to any perfect answer in the fancy heavens of archaic simplicity. The bee-stung pair of lips or the various appointments with ritual are answers to something—to a need for rest—but not to our questions and these questions are what count. It is not so easy. We must also beware of the lofty question-answering fury in a writer. For the crime of *hubris*—that mad pride which leads a mortal to compare himself with Aldous Huxley or William

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Saroyan—he should be trampled into submission by ten thousand of the top editors of *Time,* all wearing wet galoshes. The writer may be looking for Reality (abstract), but he can find it only in Real Life (concrete). That is, the abstract essence is contained only within the facts of life. The Idea of Woman can never replace the way Sally scratches her head. The Celestial Milkman can only be surmised from that clinking, clanking chap who comes to the door with a brilliant smile, a doctored bill, a Teamster's button in his cap, and an opinion about Brigitte Bardot. The Ultimate Meaning of coconuts and milk remains elusive despite coconut cream pie, camembert, butter, and that bump on the head when you fall asleep under the palm tree. When the writer eats a meal for the FBI and finds God, what he really finds is the roast beef pearled with droplets of blood, the golden sweet potatoes, the stray pea in the succotash, the salad tossed with crisp moral lettuce and determined erotic vinegar. That is, he finds God. That is, he finds food and love in time of hunger.

He is not sure of anything. He is absolutely certain about everything.

Saul Bellow, an exemplary writer of this generation, expresses most clearly the philosophical and religious quest contained within an abiding sense for passing things. All his work seems to ask the question, "Why am I here?" And answers his comic mood: "Because I'm here—that's enough!" And in his mood of despair: "Because I'm here—that's not enough!" But his intensely lyrical and dramatic, onflowing participation in the life of his Chicago, his Africa, his universe makes the underlying metaphysical question possible; and so his deepest answer seems to be: "Why? Because we are all here together on earth. It is both enough and not enough."

That is probably the only permanent answer to a question which never remains the same.

2. The novel and the story

What the novelist seems to be doing at his philosophical best is to explore possibility.[1] He cuts loose from the expected and sees another possibility for an entire life—his own, his characters',

[1] A few sentences here are taken from the author's introduction to his stories in *Fifteen by Three,* by Cassill, Gold, and Hall (New Directions).

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everybody's. The mystery of personality, that unheard sound, always the most heavy presence in a place, works its way to some concrete clap of existence through the tangle of growth which is a successful novel. The great novelists, hearing new sounds, building new worlds in the jungle of the real world, are also great moralists by implication—committed, before all else, to an intense valuation of human experience in the here and now. They are also dangerous and destructive moralists. With angry shouts and kicks they clear away their place in the jungle before they build. They tear down our customary ways of looking at things. They stare into the sun of alternatives. They tell us: You can choose this, you can decide that. You are free! Or if not, you must seek to be free.

In the short story, a writer does something rather different in degree and therefore different in quality. Of course, some novels are merely long stories and some stories are merely foreshortened novels, but in general the short story is work conceived with greater rigor than the novel. The short story writer pretty much knows what he is about when he begins; he puts on the smoked glasses of a limited form before watching the eclipse of the sun. The novelist, bound to freedom, may end up blind, roasted, stupefied, and lonely. He sets out with only a hint of the end of the voyage on which he has embarked with no maps but the sealed secret orders of instinct and intelligence. He is as blind as a Secretary of State on the brink of—he knows not what. He is chronically in a bad way, dazzled and sunburnt, and heading full steam up shiftless creek.

Because of this necessity of psychic confusion crystallizing out toward inexplicable and miraculous clarity in the important novel —*novel* means *new,* and the novel brings us unwanted news of the world—the short story is usually more reassuring both to read and to write. The agony of doubt is relieved. The destructive power of a total revaluation of experience is not risked. The writer can put down some of his moral baggage. In the story he *knows*—and only doubt, dread, expectation infect him with that inner debate of chronic invention. Knowledge is knowledge—certain-sure. It is as present and comforting as a baked potato. It is what it is. Add butter and salt and have no fear.

Yet, a story is not quite as sure as a baked potato. (*Nota bene:*

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Even the potato may have a worm baked into it.) The parables of the great prophets and saints are truer than their moral conclusions because tongue-tied and tail-tied to life, which means to unending reinterpretation and re-understanding. (The word "truth" here is defined as the product of a viable manner of looking—with energy and love—rather than as a formulated conclusion.) Like the great parables, like a novel, a story opens out into a new world, too. At its best, as someone said of something else, it "goes on going on." Sometimes it won't stop going on. The most ruthless writer has trouble putting his stories away from him. Many a novel has been pried out of a writer by a dissatisfaction with what started out to be a story. He reads and thinks: No, no, that can't be all. Those people can't stop here. Now they should . . . .

And all at once he finds himself committed to a year or two of griping, sweating, typing and retyping, scratching, poking, jumping out of bed at odd hours, like a parent with a cranky child, because a scene or a character or a situation does not let him sleep. He wants to shake his finger at each new story: "Promise you'll stay put if I give you your say?"

Part of the difference between the short story and the novel is the difference between a love affair and marriage. The first is piquant, exciting, less risky, but may cause beautiful troubles, such as wedlock. The second is long, complicated, noisy, unpredictable, very often unhappy, and absolutely prime to living on earth. The total commitment of marriage is very different from the lyrical joys of love. The novel is different from the story, and not merely because longer and heavier. The responsibility is total. "In dreams begin responsibilities"—in stories. "In the day responsibilities end, they end in responsibilities"—so the blessed total envelopment of a novel tells us. Those who read and write both forms treasure these two modes of experiencing fiction. And of course we love either a novel or a story as we love a girl—not for intelligence or virtue—but for the way it meets our gaze.

The short story, as it has developed since James Joyce, seems to be concerned with scene and incident, striking hot, like the lyrical poem. The novel since Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy has increasingly charged itself to make the whole man face the whole world—really the metaphysical enterprise, the bedrock sense of religious

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thought. Therefore a wholly questing writer like Ralph Ellison, forging or attempting to forge a total view of his world in which a man can stand, is poorly served by the short story form, although his *Invisible Man* is one of the fine books of the decade and a representative one in its basic philosophical purpose. When the center does not hold, we try to make new centers. Or, in stories, the man whose center does not hold relies on the celebrational hope of poetry—this deed, this moment, this passing love or hate. A man may face the world alone in a story as in a novel, but he does not try to give himself his final name. He is less likely to be Melville's Ishmael than John Cheever's country husband, troubled in love, trying to make out.

The difference between the short story and the novel can be expressed also through another partly parallel, overlapping set of categories. The short story tends to control and formalize experience (though the expressionistic story does not); the novel tends to set forward experience in documentary detail (though the Jamesian novel does not). Fiction can be divided this way into two types: first, that which seeks the ordered ranging and mastery of ideas; second, that which seeks the mastery of experience by passionate avowal. The first writer says: "This is what I can do with it!" The second says, "This is how it is—all of it!" The writers who Avow have the virtues of weight of feeling, purgation by life, passion with its submissions and excesses. They run the risks of looseness, maudlin howling, self-indulgence. The writers who Control give the satisfactions of answering formal demands for order, of coming to an understanding of ends and causes and thus purging us of menace. They run the risks of a false, faked formalism, of giving us resolutions which do not resolve. As the Avowers may howl unnaturally, so the Controllers may build atrocious humps on their backs. One tries to go from the particular to the sublime, the other from the reticulated to the sublime.

No writer of any lasting interest is purely one thing or the other. The best writers of the Fifties have both expressed the disasters of the times and given us some tentative notions of order. And the great writer, who has the chance of producing a masterpiece, certainly combines both of these irreconcilables, the Avowed and the Controlled—just as estranged metals can finally be fused under great heat. With fire, pressure, and continued

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intensity, the great artist rises to the peak of emotion and the pitch of resolution in the same work—and so, as Aristotle says, we are at last purged of pity and terror. In some way, the moving image of desire has been expressed through the life of one person, that monster individual, the hero who at last represents us all.

3. The writer as Cricken, Floozie, Elder Revolutionist, Young Fogie, Beautician, Mortician, etc., Including Farflung Flinger into Fans (watch out)

Harassed, often mistaken and mistook, blessed at his best by good hope and fruitful despair, the writer of the Fifties played hide-and-go-seek amid the disasters of the time.

He made a characteristic kind of fiction—anxious, humorous, demanding—in the image of man's hope during years when every thinking person had to be his own Don Quixote. The windmills surround us for the charging. Sheep may not safely graze, sheep in these days may not even safely gaze; but some writers munched and nosed and threw off their sheep's clothing. They ran against the furious windmills.

Who is the writer who gives us the strongest view of the time? First, who is he NOT?

Not the fabricated fakes of television, Hollywood, and the mass magazines (not Harry Belafonte improving race relations by playing a Chinese version of *Green Pastures* in yellowface);

Not the Truth Trumpeters with a capital P (for Penultimate Reality); who are made of the nerves left over when Dr. Jekyll turned himself into Mr. Hyde;

Nor the Crickens (Critical Chicken-Hearts saying, "Complex it up, fellas, Russian it up a little!");

Nor the Floozies (Philosophical Ooozers of Timeless Indifference);

Nor Sloan Wilson and Herman Wouk with their new upper-middle soap opera (an easier detergent for the togethered souls of suburban lads and lassies of whatever moribund condition);

Nor the Young Fogies queerly proclaiming a brotherhood of gangbang and gangwhimper—real toadies in imaginary gardens ("I'm one Hell of a Guy, Damn! A-tearin' down society and grammar! A-preachin' of the gospel to all us delinquent kids! Man! Zip! Zen! Wow!");

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Nor the Elder Tired Revolutionists ("I have found fair logos under the skirt of Henry James and in the handkerchief which Tom Eliot keeps up his sleeve");

Nor the Beauticians and Uglifiers like Tennessee W., Truman C., Speed L. ("It's so dreadful out here in the *world.* Lemme back, Ma!");

Nor the Morticians, those guilty refugees afflicted with severe cases of penance-envy ("I've read Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, Toynbee, Russell Kirk, Peter Viereck, and my own heart, which shrivels up inside me like the stretchsox off my foot, and I tell you, brethren, it was all a mistake. God meant us to go elsewhere, down below.");

Nor the various other crossbred jackals, bats, woodlice, small-eared asses, woolly barn owls, ferrets, and viewers with abstract alarm.

Then *who?*

Don Quixote, Jungle Jim, scapegoat, juggler, spinach-toothed President of Himself, the great writer of our times will be a person who loots the world for good reason, relishing his prize. He will not have a mediocre subject—himself. He will have a subject with grandiose boundary and tangled interior—*himself.* As a man of our time, he will sing about love, ambition, and mortality expressed through the events of days and nights; and buried within the miraculous willed accidents which move his people will be questions about the relation between freedom and isolation, independence and loneliness, love and weakness, that brutal egotism which is false personality and the fearful abandonment of the risks of personality which is false socialization. The writer as bandit in the wide world does not know exactly what he will find, frozen shrimp or cash or a good swift kick in the assumptions, but he is bound to his life of sunny crime; he is committed to love, hate, death, and rebirth, as indeed we all are. The ophthalmologists tell us that exercise will not improve nearsightedness; the eye is not a muscle. However, it may be that the soul is a muscle and that myopia of the soul can be ameliorated by stretching the imagination.

If there is a will by the reader.

If the artist has both the will and a strong inner chart.

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MAXINE W. KUMIN

400 Meter Freestyle

THE GUN full swing the swimmer catapults and cracks
s
i
x
feet away onto that perfect glass he catches at
a
n
d
throws behind him scoop after scoop cunningly moving
t
h
e
water back to move him forward. Thrift is his wonderful
s
e
c
ret; he has schooled out all extravagance. No muscle
r
i
p
ples without compensation wrist cock to heel snap to
h
i
s
mobile mouth that siphons in the air that nurtures
h
i
m
at half an inch above sea level, so to speak.
T
h
e
astonishing whites of the soles of his feet rise

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a
n
d
salute us on the turns. He flips, converts & is gone
a
l
l
in one. We watch him for signs. His arms are steady at
t
h
e
catch, his cadent feet tick in the stretch, they know
t
h
e
lesson well. Lungs know, too; he does not list for
a
i
r
he drives along on little sips carefully expended
b
u
t
that plum red heart pumps hard cries hurt how soon
i
t
s
near one more and makes its final pledge
T
I
M
E 4:25:9

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Breakthrough: Nonesuch Pond

This foreign land is where we swim in summer.
Three days and nights of freeze have caught it flat
So that the underbelly shows. A swimmer
Hardly sees these fingerlings, or what
The bottom current twitches so that now
They look like fish among the magicked plants
Fastened in layers of glass. Around we go,
Crisping the saucer sides, remembering once
This was a tropic place; the inlet teemed
With water striders, mossy frogs, and we
Fished here and swam and picnicked. Then it seemed
Incredible that seasons change. Now three
Days of freeze have brought our neighbors out,

Medleys of skaters: skirring girls with bells
Tied to their laces for a mating call;
Rangy boys dodging, elastic as eels,
Smacking pucks, tangling hockey sticks, asprawl
On the ice, shucking their jackets off; squat
Quilted wobblers reaming with their ankle bones
Two ways at once, falling, hauled upright
By trousered mothers, tall and stiff as cranes;
Solitary men skating, hands behind
Their backs; one puffing on a pipe and leaning
Like a weathered sapling into the wind;
And always a skidding dog, cold, whining,
Being collared by the boy who let him out.

Late afternoon. Skaters still seam a ring
Around the pond, a circle that shuts in
The grey curd over black water where a spring
Freshens the core. We know the center's thin
And keep away and keep our children back,
But someone's child, chasing for a puck,
Shoots out beyond the mark and is snatched in.
No warning crack, no cry—and he is gone
Or almost gone, except three boys slide flat
And make a chain and clamp a hockey stick

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Against his chest, and that is almost that
Except the safe boy melts the skaters back.
The pond is cleared. The afternoon runs out,

And where the ice was breached, the water rakes
A summer stick to motion in the pool.
Tonight will be enough to mend the break
And catch the branch up in its icy hull
So that, on this flat plain, the tilted limb
Will flag tomorrow where the boy went down.
Let skaters, circling this deceptive skim,
Know here the ice uncorks. From this line
Days will eat the crust off; our overland
Revert to water, we succeed to boats,
Lilies put up new stems and the spring spawn
Thicken; all this we stand on turn about.
Nights enough will bring the peepers out.

JAMES WRIGHT

The Accusation

I kissed you in the dead of dark,
And no one knew, or wished to know,
You bore, across your face, a mark
From birth, those shattered years ago.
Now I can never keep in mind
The memory of your ugliness
At the right moment. I was blind,
And I could only feel your face.

Often enough I had seen that slash
Of fire you quickly hid in shame;
You flung your kerchief on the flesh,
And piteously spoke my name.
Thus I remember daylight and

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The scar that made me pity you,
And damn them both, you understand.
Pity was never love, you know.

I needed you because your face
Was broken as my hands were heavy;
And yet you kissed me only in darkness
To make me think of you as lovely.
You were not lovely emptiness
That any light-eyed fool can find;
To turn away your genuine face
From me, my love, you were unkind.

What can I do, tossing all night,
But half-remember what you were?
And I remember the cold daylight,
And pity your appalling scar,
As any light-eyed fool could pity,
Seeing you slipping down the street.
I lose your stark essential beauty,
Because your hand turned out the light.

If I were given a blind god's power
To turn your daylight on again,
I would not raise you smooth and pure:
I would bare to heaven your uncommon pain,
Your scar I had a right to hold,
To touch, because the pain was yours.
Now you are dead, and I grow old,
And the doves cackle out of doors,

And lovers, twitching on the lights,
Turned to behold each lovely other.
Let them remember fair delights,
But I shall never love another,
No, even though you banished me
From that scarred truth of wretchedness,
Your face, that I shall never see
Again, though I search every place.

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But Only Mine

I dreamed that I was dead, as all men do,
And feared the dream, though hardly for the sake
Of any thrust of pain my flesh might take
Below the softening shales. Bereft of you,
I lay for days and days alone, I knew
Somewhere above me boughs were burning gold,
And women's frocks were loose, and men grew old.

Grew old. And withered. Asked the time of day.
Forgot the hour. Turned. Looked among the grass.
Tripped on a twig. Frightened some birds away.
Children. And girls. I knew, above my face,
Rabbit and jay flocked, wondering how to cross
An empty field stripped naked to the sun.
They limped into the shade, and huddled down.

Rabbit and jay, old man, and girl, and child,
All moved above me, dreaming in broad light.
I heard you walking lightly through the field.
Out of my sound, out of your living sight,
The living drifted off, and soon the night
Gathered your soft despondent shoulders near.
Deep in my dream, the dead rose everywhere.

I did not dream your death, but only mine.
I did not reach to gather you toward me.
Your body bloomed, your hands became a vine
That ploughed my grave. Straining with agony
I rose, I blossomed, the dark dropped away.
Rapid October suns were far too slow
To waken me to dawn, I loved you so.

The thews of autumn shook, I turned so deep.
Savage to find your human hands, I woke,
And found my body wakening out of sleep
Under the mocking face of my poor clock,
Whom, thereupon, I flung away and broke.
Innocent time, that rang into my life,
Belled me to daylight and the usual grief.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

Six Sonnets from 'The Gates of Janus'

I

This is the waiting-room, lamped stark with gas.
The moon upon the wall treads out the deep
Part of its arc. Bare forms. Nobody says
A word. They are not awake, they cannot sleep.
It's a cold welcome here: it seems the fire's
Never been laid. Randomly, passengers come
In—then go out, not speaking . . . Nothing transpires.
No finding, in a merely waiting room.
We all wait for something. It can't be the train,
It seems so urgent and close, surely it might
Come now, now, leave just the false dawn
An hour's thousand miles round the slow night.
The slow train hisses in. Everyone seeks
A carriage to himself. Still nobody speaks.

II

Under the burning tiger's lonely track
Into the plains of air, two tall men stood
Upon a patch of shunting-yard, soaked black.
Bitter and fierce and intransigeant their mood:
Facing, red-eyed, stark naked: never a sound
They made, but closed and struggled till one threw
The other; writhed and wormed upon the ground;
Broke, and resumed their violent pose anew.
Dawn opened wider, trains began to throng
Across the mazed points; then like pods when ripe,
Yielded their black seed thousand thousands strong.
Nothing disturbed the savage antitype.
The coal-blurred sweat-drenched wrestlers still fought on.
Unheeded too the mounting tiger shone.

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III

After about ten years, they met again.
In total silence each of them endured
The terror and pity of seeing each line and plane
In the traumatic face thus caricatured.
Picasso's dicing-box, surely it was,
Jumbled them so. These faces seemed to shriek,
That once made soundless harmony for their eyes.
—Eyes growing too eloquent, soon they tried to speak.
The wisdom of that move, too, soon proved in doubt,
For powers of conversation are impaired
When every topic's worn or else ruled out:
And one pre-occupied them both:—what stared
Both in the face: each was suffering an
Irremediable, because cathartic pain.

IV

The winter river, swept by arc-lamps, flamed
And bit. They stripped and swam. The man was drowned.
The villagers downstream buried him, unnamed.
She snarled for air; groped on; rubbed shelving ground,
Fought the grass stakes (the frost intensified)
Dropped in a ditch, huddled for warmth and shaped
More like a foetus than a girl; and died.
No searchers found her. No one else escaped.
Austere and tall and grey as graved in stone,
Intense with total calm, and open-eyed
In stark reflection on what they had done,
But proud and impenitent, one on either side
The carcass, two shapes brooded, stern and still:
The colossi of the reason and the will.

V

This was for good. Their fingers even stripped
Skin from the shuddering wrists. They felt no pain
Being a great smarting wound of hate . . . One slipped,
Deep in the grass. His enemy whirled down

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Like a flung rag turned steel, his two arms linked
Tight on the striving neck, he bent the head.
Life jerked and jerked . . . It then became extinct.
The lips oozed out its quiet frustrated red.
Big game hunters record their pang of joy
And love, at the last slaverings of the beast
They sought such varied dangers to destroy:
He felt it now, or nearly—or at least
Wondered whether he did, as he stared at
The corpse. Nothing ruffled the sudden quiet.

VI

The eyes, what I see is the hundred cattle's crazed eyes
Sheen in the blue lamplight as they suddenly round
Into the street down to the town, their cries
And the wilder-eyed drovers' cries, and on cobble-shod ground
Their hooves' violent downpour like violent rain
Deafen the dark's frost. In reasonless fear
I stand stock still. Raving and slashing, the men
And the unshod animals slither and jostle and roar
In a river that empties its own bed, vanishes in
The pitch-black slaughter-house's floodlit screaming hall.
Silence returns in a wave of the arm; so soon,
My back stands still to the glass-fanged granite wall:
In the circles of the ear I hear the loud
Minotaurs, still driving the maze-led terrified crowd.

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LEONARD R. HOFFMAN

Mr. and Mrs. Jazz

WHEN PROSPERITY SETTLED DOWN on mid-century America with a great chromium grin, Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Newton of San Juan and Park Avenue were unimpressed. They had been born into it. Mrs. Newton's family had arrived by way of aluminum and Mr. Newton's by cattle, so that when they married money permanently ceased to be a problem.

"But the trouble with you two is, you lack charm."

"Dear Ray," said Mrs. Newton.

The Newtons were sitting at a table in a nightclub with Ray Voyer, a young advertiser whom they'd picked up as a hobby a while back, partly on the strength of his remark, "I was born three drinks below par." At the moment he had more than made up the difference.

"No, seriously," he said. "You're thirty years too late. If this were Scott Fitzgerald's time you'd be going great. You could knock down waiters and fall into fountains and stand on the roof with no clothes on and everybody would say, 'Rah, there go those madcap Newtons again.' "

"Let's change the topic," said Mr. Newton.

"Sure. Well, as I was saying, thirty years ago you'd have been fine, but now the style's changed. You're just sick. Nowadays if you have money you've got to be productive and earnest—like young Rockefeller and Ford."

Mr. Newton stopped listening. He was thinking of another night in this place several years before, the evening that brought what he now thought of as the first stage of his married life to a close.

It was the night that marked the end of their travels—of what had started out as a year's honeymoon in Europe and then had turned into a more and more irritable and confused tour of practically the entire planet, with occasional breathers in Manhattan. Hawaii had been the last and the most drunken and the worst. There they had both started affairs with different members of their set and used to have long incoherent arguments about

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it when they were drunk together, and sometimes the arguments would slide off into friendly exchanges of details, and then back again into self-pitying dramatics that were forgotten as soon as they were enunciated, as though reality had finally slipped its moorings and they couldn't be sure what existed and what did not. Of this, Mr. Newton could remember little except the tone, and one Sunday afternoon when waking from a hangover doze on the beach at Waikiki he had looked up at the blue Pacific sky and thought in honest amazement that it really would be better to be dead.

From then on they had confined themselves to America, or rather, divided their time between their apartment on Park Avenue and the estate they had bought on San Juan to go to when it was essential to have sunlight and quiet.

But if the exhaustion that brought them back from Hawaii carried one era to a close, it also marked the opening of a new one. For the same energy that had pushed them from country to country now turned inward and for a time made them puritanically sick of faces like their own at cocktail parties and sick of cocktail smalltalk. They wanted significance.

However, Mr. Newton soon found horses boring, whether raced or bred, and Mrs. Newton got no pleasure whatever out of organizing groups of young matrons to assist the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After a few months of this misdirection and aimlessness their life settled down again and assumed its new form. They became hobbyists.

The first was art and it was very good. It began with an argument about some modern paintings at a friend's house, and from there it went on to museums, a few tentative purchases, and finally the investment in a major Pollock. Then they sat in on lectures at N.Y.U. and began having artists from New York and Connecticut over for drinks. They even asked one of the younger men to teach them how to paint, and Mr. Newton produced some strong tubular forms in murk and Mrs. Newton made bright patterns of speckles as though she had taken mouthfuls of different colored paint and spit them at the canvas in a fine mist, and the young artist told her in private that her yellow hair was Pre-Raphaelite and tried to make her, which made it all the better.

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Then one morning Mrs. Newton didn't feel like painting or looking at painting and neither did Mr. Newton. This was particularly bad because it was the first time and they were drunk for over a week and had some classical fights that they couldn't remember and for the first time a kind of fright that made them hold each other tight in bed.

When they came out of it they found themselves becoming more interested in those of their friends who were Catholic. After they read Raissa Maritain this drift toward the church became stronger and they presently found a priest who specialized in theatrical conversions. But the deeper they now went the more racking it got until one day when Mrs. Newton told Mr. Newton how she had broken down and cried on the priest and he had said he couldn't help her unless she had just a little faith, they both felt they were doing something impossible, and feeling that way went off on another drunk.

Then it was do-it-yourself and Mr. Newton had to make special arrangements with the management to get the machinery installed in the third guest room. But after he made a spice rack they didn't need and Mrs. Newton cut her hand on the band saw, the vacuum began to open up again.

This time they didn't quite hit bottom. About half way down they made a transition to what other people had done themselves and began to find purpose and truth in collecting cane-bottom chairs and early clocks. They did this thoroughly because by now it was very important to have something to hang on to and not keep making mistakes. Thus, when they would get into the car to explore back roads for antiques, it was with a sense of closing in on the personal.

And presently, as they began to redecorate their apartment, the Pollock came down and a Hudson River School primitive went up. In the fall they went to New England for lamps and there in the full blaze of the maples Mrs. Newton at last found a pre-Revolutionary Betty lamp and looked so happy in the car that Mr. Newton took her in his arms and said "I love you." That winter they drove West because Mr. Newton had grown interested in frontier revolvers, and when they were back in the city again Mrs. Newton brought her toleware collection to completion with a magnificently preserved cookie canister, which now had a great

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dent in it where she had thrown it at Mr. Newton two nights ago and it had missed and hit the edge of the fireplace mantel.

This time it was so bad the liquor didn't do any good and they stopped fighting. Instead they felt the quiet that happens when a bomb goes off so close that the concussion paralyzes your eardrums. Like certain microscopic creatures, they were in a state where if they were touched at any point, the whole organism would contract.

Ray Voyer was shaking his head at Newton's long silence.

"And on top of that," he continued, "you guys've been out of circulation too long. You're not with it any more." He pushed his chair back from the table. "So come along with uncle Ray and get educated. There's a jig with a clarinet at the Simba I want you to see that really - - -." He rose, bringing them to their feet.

The Simba was in the Village, a downstairs place that aimed at the effect of a drawing room, with crowded couches and coffee tables, and was correspondingly expensive. The Newtons arrived during a break and were already seated near the piano working on a round of drinks, with Mr. Newton wishing it were late already so that he'd feel tired enough to sleep, when the performers came out again. "He calls himself Sam, just Sam," he heard Voyer explaining, and while the accompanist went to the piano, Newton watched a short negro with a bald head and rimless eyeglasses take a seat near by and sit with a clarinet across his knees. Newton thought he looked like a bank teller and returned to his drink.

Later the Newtons agreed that they never knew just how it happened. All Newton remembered was that he was drinking and that the pianist had spotted out a few chords and that with no other preamble he had found himself listening to the saddest music he had ever heard in his life. It was quiet music and slow, but it was like a burning wire laid across the heart. He stopped drinking and listened blankly, and it was as though he was in direct communication with somebody who knew all that he knew and more and was talking about it with a clarinet, describing the aimlessness and the frustration, the permanent and changeless disappointment at the heart of things.

He only partly heard Voyer half an hour later suggesting that they move on, and finally Voyer's petulant departure when Mrs.

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Newton said he might go if he wished but that she wanted to stay. During the next break Newton returned to his drink and looked across the table at his wife, really seeing her for the first time that evening. Her eyes were withdrawn and seemed close to tears, although the subdued lighting and cigarette smoke made it difficult to be sure. He smiled and was surprised when she reached out her hand to his.

That, too, was something they were unable to explain later—that, and the fact that they stayed until closing time and then came back again the next night. For jazz, popular music, whatever you wanted to call it, was something they had both grown up with and accepted as a matter of course, as one of the routine amenities in the background. It was what you danced to, or put on the radio at low volume sometimes when you were killing time with a drink or reading a magazine. The idea of anyone except high school kids listening to it seriously would have struck them as peculiar.

As the music began again, Newton wondered if he felt the way he now did simply because he had never heard jazz of this caliber before or whether a person had to get to a certain point before it made sense and that he—or rather both of them, since his wife seemed as taken up by it as he did—had at long last arrived there.

But in the days that followed they didn't want to talk about it because they felt the familiar grip taking hold and they were scared. If this was going to turn out to be another "hobby" which would lift them up to the point where they felt human again and then suddenly let go, as the others had, each worse than the one before, let them come smashing down and smashing against each other—. No, Newton thought, there are just so many crackups a person can take—one more of those and we won't be recognizable.

Nevertheless the grip continued and confirmed itself, and when Sam left to open up on the Coast the Newtons went on to other nightclubs and found that after a few times they could tell if the music was honest or fake. It was a distinction that had never occurred to them before, but now it made the whole difference, because if the music was fake, and it mostly was, it was merely patterns with nothing in it, and worse than just boring because it was so disappointing; but if it was honest—even if the honesty came from only a couple of the players—then that calming, excit-

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ing and sad communication started up again, sad even when it was very fast and tricky and full of good humor.

And presently they began buying records and having enthusiasms. At first they made all sorts of mistakes, but eventually they got the schools and the signposts straight, and since many of the recordings were old and others were so remarkable that it would have been a shame to miss an overtone, they explored high fidelity equipment and that gave the interest still another dimension. As the weeks went by they started to collect people who were familiar with these matters—people who could make connections for them and tell them what to read and point out maneuvers they hadn't noticed on the records but which immediately added to their enjoyment and became part of all future listening.

And when two months went by without any need to go to San Juan they felt pretty good about it, although they thought it would be nice to take a trip, a little one. So they went to Kansas City to see about the jazz there, which turned out to be dead, but that was all right because the trip was all right and they felt more confident. Then they went to New Orleans and found that the top musicians there were the same ones who turned up in New York. After that they went to California and found the jazz there active but too mental and thin.

When they were back in New York again Mrs. Newton discovered Django Reinhardt and after reading a book on le jazz hot suggested that they drop over to France to see what was going on there. Now that was taking a chance and they both knew it, but by now they felt strong enough to prove a point. And that turned out all right, too. The jazz wasn't much, but when they ran into old friends on the international circuit and found that they could stay pretty sober and not want to change partners, they felt that they were really pulling out of it.

In fact, when they returned to New York Mrs. Newton felt that her husband had pulled out of it so far that he had moved into another kind of life and pulled her along with him. For he now began to read voraciously and listen to their growing library of recordings with the concentration of a scholar. And then one day he announced that he was going to write an article. He had discovered some incorrect dating in the output of Jelly Roll Morton, evidence that would upset certain theories about Morton's con-

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tribution to jazz. When Mrs. Newton returned home from a shopping expedition late the next afternoon and found him scribbling away at his desk with a pitcher of martinis at his right elbow hardly touched and all the ice melted, she felt a sudden unreasoning love for him. When the article was finished he titled it "A Date with Jelly Roll" and sent it off to *Riff* magazine, and when the letter came with the acceptance he was as happy as a small boy and declared he was going to have the check framed.

Then a few days later there was a bad moment. It was night and he was lying in bed with a clear head, unaccountably unable to sleep. So to pass the time until he should become tired he began to make plans for the coming day. He would start off by putting their Armstrong collection in order and then look into that new book about Storeyville and, oh yes, see about that buzzing in the speakers when brass came on loud. And then while he was lying there it was as though he could see an endless series of such days, one following the other forward into infinity, and it was all suddenly pointless. For a moment his mind was like a quiet pool when a stone hits the surface and the reflections of the trees and sky and houses suddenly shake and are destroyed. He found himself sliding out of bed and practically running to the bathroom for a double dose of nembutal and a full glass of whiskey to wash it down and put him out before this could go any further.

In the morning he remembered little of the night clearly, but he did not put the Armstrong collection in order and was glad when his wife left to visit a friend in New Rochelle. Mixing a strong drink, he put a record on the machine at random and sat down, heavy with depression. When the music began it was so bad that he started up to stop it, then dropped back in his seat again as really making little difference. It was a strictly commercial orchestra from the twenties working its way through a standard arrangement with a college-boy tenor whining insincerely about a Sentimental Baby. Why had he ever gotten that? he wondered, then remembered that Beiderbecke came in on it for a few bars—like a skyrocket going off in a cesspool.

But as he listened the cheap melancholy began to take hold, its sadness only accentuated by the outdatedness of the arrangement. When it was done he played it again, wondering with vague surprise if that sort of thing really did characterize its time. When it

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stopped once more he made a fresh drink and set up a stack of similar records—what he had once called "the untouchables": Trumbauer, Whiteman and the like—and set it spinning.

The room filled with the nasal endearments of untrained boys, the sugary giggle of violins and the whomping of defunct tubas. And Newton found himself thinking not of the themes and variations but of girls with cupid-bow mouths doing the Charleston, and Stutz Bearcats prowling the Island for roadhouse speakeasies; young Lindbergh returning under the confetti and raw skyscrapers going up. And as he drank, nostalgia for dead time flooded into him, for the irrecoverable certainties of his childhood, the self-confidence of those decades of archeozoic innocence when men wore derbies at a slant and the news about Russia and Germany was the old bushwa, and going to bed with your best friend's wife was naughty but nice.

When Mrs. Newton got home he was drunk and happy, eager to explain to her that they had been going down a blind alley and that the real truth of jazz wasn't the art of great individuals but was the mirror it made of the times, the heartbeat of the civilization it echoed, and how if you went at it that way you could go right through it like a doorway into the past when the world was clear and understandable and where you might even be able to find your lost roots. He put the records on to show her and she had a drink and became interested.

In the weeks that followed, this new vision gripped them and sent them out in all directions. Newton immersed himself in the legends of Al Capone and Jimmy Walker; Mrs. Newton visited the museum to check her memory of the ways people had dressed; they bought up stacks of yellowed magazines bound in heavy twine to document what had been important. What were the cars in those days like again? Was eye-shadow really that popular? My god, did they really mix gin and applejack? And exactly when was it that trousers flared at the bottom; and all those gangsters who were machinegunned in that garage—was that the same year The Man I Love came out, or was it later?

Out of this rich compost of the past the idea of The Party gradually emerged. Although neither of them could say who first thought of it, they agreed that it was going to be something

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splendid, a night of total recall with no sparing of expenses—more than that, an affirmation of their new approach to life.

They picked a country club on the north shore and reserved it far in advance to make sure there would be time for all the arrangements and decorations. And then the preparations began.

It was in the storeroom of a Chinese restaurant in the Bronx that they finally ran down a multimirrored revolving ball and the dusty projector with colored filters to aim at it as it rotated on the ballroom ceiling. Then there was the lucky find of a case of prohibition rye with each bottle plainly labeled for medicinal use only, and the difficulty about glass-bead curtains, and the friend whose hobby was automobiles volunteering a restored Buick with wooden spokes in the wheels and iridescent flower vases by the window straps to stand before the entrance in the driveway. Then the main item, the choice of the band—and after much consultation of old programs and newspapers the decision that the exactly right one would be Al Beckendorff and His Kollege Kadets. The band, it turned out, had long since disintegrated—Al was now running a drycleaning establishment in Ventura and the trombonist had died of cancer in 1937—but the Newtons persisted with sheer money and good spirits and Al was flown out from the Coast and dug up a replacement on the trombone. Then there were the invitations to send announcing a roaring twenties party, requesting "Come As You Were." And, of course, the visits to the tailor.

When the night finally came and the guests began to arrive in a flurry of fitted coats and boas and evening capes with one husband already half crocked in prehistoric raccoon, they were greeted at the entrance by the Newtons arm in arm, Mr. Newton rakish in bellbottomed trousers and hair brushed down very flat on both sides of a center part, and Mrs. Newton swathed in a huge necklace over a dress with the waist practically at her knees and a rollercoaster hem.

"Ladies and gents," Mr. Newton ushered them in, "the booze is to the right." That got a laugh, and in they went where the band was playing San with sudden hot flares from the trumpets. The rye got another laugh, although there were plenty of more civilized alternatives, and so did the trays of Helmars and Fatimas. But after a while the laughter tapered off because the party was

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too good for detachment. And when, standing near the drum with the silhouette of a naked girl with a mortarboard in a champagne glass and K.K. and bubbles rising on it, Al Beckendorff held a megaphone and sang Avalon in a husky voice, some of the older people felt their eyes go moist, on the threshold of a world they had never expected to see again. Later when the revolving ball was casting its stars through the intimate electrical twilight and the band seemed to be crooning rather than playing Moonlight Bay, Newton danced his wife through the beaded curtain to the cloakroom and kissed her and she put her head on his shoulder and said, "Oh, it's a success. It's a success."

Afterwards the Newtons were amused to find that they had started a mild jazz craze in their set, and for some weeks a few Park Avenue drawing rooms echoed to the sound of ripe corn. But for themselves the twenties were now finished. Like a chemist's reagent, the party had precipitated the unknown so that they could see it, taste it and smell it, and now they were ready to go further.

They wanted to push this thing right to its source—to get at the germ of it, the root which wouldn't go dead with knowledge because it was the seminal node of all that came later. So they probed back into the golden age of New Orleans, where the jazz soon became more direct and innocently alien, less a reflection of the conventions of prosperous whites. And as they pushed still further, past the crying blues, the tail gates and parades, a light impatient drumming began in their nerves, reflecting itself in a slowly mounting liquor bill.

After a point the records gave out and there were only the reconstructionists—scholarly musicians like Turk Murphy and Wally Rose who could piece together again the primitive stomps and ragtime. And before that? Then they were well into the nineteenth century with the cakewalk and that wasn't jazz at all. They had a jarring sense of having overshot a terminal. But where?

Finally they made an appointment with a professor at Rochester. He received them in his office, and when Newton explained what they were after he said pretty much what they had expected.

"If you keep on in that direction, you'll find yourselves right back in ragtime."

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"Yes, but I mean before that," Newton said. "The starting point."

"Oh, I see what you mean. No, before that it's just music-hall tunes, folk tunes, ballads—European, American, same thing." He said this with the unconcern of settled fact, as though it were a footnote.

The professor paused to light a cigarette and looked at the Newtons quizzically. He thought they both seemed a little feverish, and he wasn't sure whether that was whiskey on the man's breath. Still, it was very nice of them to drive all the way up from New York just to consult him, and you had to remember that people like these weren't professionals. They were obviously hobbyists and, from the way they dressed, well-heeled hobbyists at that. He didn't want to disappoint.

"Of course," he went on, "it's still a frontier of sorts. Every now and then a little discovery comes along and gives us all a surprise."

Newton leaned forward.

"If you were working on that yourself, say, how would you go about it? What would you look for?"

The professor thought.

"Oh, I imagine I'd get a tape recorder and go down to New Orleans. If I could get a grant for it, that is," he smiled. "And I'd spend my time working on a transitional figure—one of the men who crossed the line from parlor music to ragtime and got the whole thing going. Scott Joplin, probably. I've always thought he was the most promising."

"Thank you," Mrs. Newton said. "That's just what we wanted to know."

The professor raised a qualifying hand.

"Now of course you know that field's been pretty well picked over. You might have to do some heavy digging, and even then—"

They bought an Ampex and flew south. In the first systematic week of visiting nightclubs and making inquiries they got nowhere—nobody they talked to had even heard of Joplin. So they began to drink more heavily and had one dangerous scene on their bed in the hotel suite, although luckily the energy of it was deflected against "the problem" and it didn't get to that

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frightening point where they began to tear each other apart.

And then one night a bandleader said, "No, I'm sorry to say I never heard of that man. But I know somebody who just might be able to satisfy you."

"Who's that?"

"Andy LeDuc. He's a real oldtimer."

But it turned out that LeDuc was finishing a job in Chicago, and they had to wait till the end of the week for him to return to town.

"Mr. LeDuc," Newton said at their table during a break while the colored man put his hand around the offered drink, "We've been told you might be able to help us with a little problem."

"Joplin?" LeDuc said when it had been explained. "Joplin, eh? Now that's a toughie. You'd better just let me give my brains a whirl on it during this next set and see what I can come up with."

When he came back again and sat down to a fresh drink he looked at them both and said, "Well, I'll tell you—I've *heard* of Joplin once or twice but that's about all. You see, that's old, Mr. Newton, *real* old."

He stared into his glass for a moment, then suddenly snapped his fingers.

"Tell you what, though, old Wash might know. He used to play piano way back then, and it does seem to me he mentioned a Scotty something or other."

"Wash?" said Mrs. Newton.

"George Washington Leemon, ma'am. I mean, if he's still alive. He was mighty old last time I saw him and that was about two years ago."

"Do you know where we might find him?" Mr. Newton said with humorless urgency.

"Well, let's see, now." LeDuc lifted his glass and drank slowly. "Seems to me he was a kind of janitor over at the Bayou. You might try there in the morning."

The Bayou turned out to be an unprosperous bar on the south side of town and for a few minutes the Newtons sat in their rented Cadillac looking at it in silence. They had both started drinking after breakfast and their nerves were like wires. Finally Newton said, "O.K., here's where we nail it."

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Inside the bar was dark and at the far end a man in a white apron was slowly polishing glasses. There was a faint smell of stale beer and smoke. The bartender saw them and looked up.

"Sorry, folks. We don't open till one."

"We're not customers, exactly," Newton said and set the tape recorder down. "We'd like some information."

The bartender was noncommital.

Newton laid a ten dollar bill on the bar. "We were told an old colored man called Wash worked here. We'd like to talk to him and thought you might be able to tell us where to find him."

The bartender smiled.

"Mister, for ten dollars you can take him home with you." He turned his head to a side door. "Wash!" he called. "Wash, come on up here!"

He turned back to the Newtons and looked at the Ampex. "Tape recorder?"

"That's right," Newton said.

"You musicians?"

"We're interested in it," Newton said.

"I thought so. A guy came in here with one of those about four, five years ago and wanted Wash to play the piano for him."

He saw Mrs. Newton looking at the side door.

"It takes him a while to get up from the cellar, lady. He's pretty old."

"Oh, I didn't—" Mrs. Newton said.

The bartender looked at them without seeming to do so and noted their tension.

"Of course, if you folks would like a little something while you're waiting—"

"Thanks," Newton said with gratitude. He ordered two double scotches.

While Newton was setting up the recorder on a table next to the piano, he heard a sound from his wife and turned. The cellar door had opened and a small, bent, very dark negro had come in. He was carrying a broom and dustpan, as though to prove he had been working and was ready for further orders.

"It's O.K., Wash, you can put that down," the bartender said, not unkindly. "These people want to talk with you. Go over to the piano with them."

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The old man reached into his shirt pocket for a pair of eyeglasses and set them carefully on his nose. He turned to Mrs. Newton, who accompanied him across the floor to Mr. Newton. The bartender went back to his glasses.

"Mr. Leemon," Newton said, reaching out and shaking the thin dry hand, "This is a pleasure. Won't you sit down?" He indicated the piano bench and set the recorder going. The old man sat down and looked at him uncertainly.

"We're doing a study of jazz," Newton continued, "and we thought you could help us—you know, give us some information. We'll be happy to pay for it, of course."

The old man stared uncomprehendingly at the twenty dollar bill that Newton placed on the keyboard. Then his face cracked into a grin. "Dat's mighty kind o you, sah. Mighty kind."

"Fine. Now there's a certain musician we're interested in. We think you may have known him long ago. His name was Scott Joplin."

The name produced no effect. Newton raised his glass and drained it. He found he was sweating.

"Scotty," he prompted into the silence. "He played cakewalks, the ragtime."

"Scotty," the old man repeated dutifully and looked down at the money for what seemed a long time. Then, "Why, you don mean ol Scotty, does you? Scotty Joplin?"

Was he lying? Obviously he was feeling his way around and obviously he wanted the money. Newton couldn't tell, and he began to have a feeling that this was all wrong—that even if it was all right it was all wrong.

"Would you like a drink, Mr. Leemon?" he said desperately.

The alcohol hit the aged nervous system like a slap. Leemon chuckled and shook his head.

"Ol Scotty," he said. "Why dat was befo de fus worl wo."

"That's right," Mrs. Newton said.

The dry little face looked up at them.

"Dat Scotty, he was de king o niggahs."

Newton nodded.

"An Jim," Leemon continued. "Jim was—"

It was clear that the connection had snapped. Leemon was reminiscing about vague, half-mythical giants from his Louisiana

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boyhood and the name Joplin appeared only incidentally, and only as a name. The Newtons exchanged a look of glacial blankness and Mr. Newton went to the bar for refills. Leemon was still rambling when he got back and Newton cut it short by saying he could have the money if he'd play them a selection like he used to in his youth. Leemon cackled that he hadn't played for a long time, but he folded the bill all the same and began to hit the keys.

Newton adjusted the level of the recorder and listened, feeling the blood pound in his ears, sweating. The tempo was much too slow, and the old man was missing the notes as often as hitting them, but, yes, it had the genuine trite beat and the lacy figuration of the earliest ragtime, lacier than Newton remembered ever hearing—almost parlor music.

And so what, Newton thought, feeling the sweat moving down his arms. So what if it is. So what if this wreck here had banged it out so often in the bars and whorehouses of his boyhood over half a century ago that he'd memorized it perfectly, and so what if he was banging it out again now for a piece of tape and two plastic wheels, knocking himself out for twenty dollars so that he'd begun to stink like rotten gardenias. So what.

And with the liquor mounting in his head to an unbearable tension, Newton thought Boy, you've had it. This is just what you were looking for all along, isn't it, all these years—this racket here, this simpleminded jangling crap. Well, there it is and here's where you get off the line. He looked at his wife, saw her turn away. And she's had it, too, he thought. We've both had it. And as he stood there with the sweat pouring out of him and his nerves snapping out of control he wanted to laugh and cry at the same time, to start smashing right and left in cold, rigid fury; and it was as though he were once again back on the sands coming out of it with the terrible blue sky of Hawaii expanding infinitely overhead.

The plastic reels spun quietly on.

That night Mr. Newton had his nose broken in a bar by a much larger man with whom everybody agreed he had deliberately picked a fight. Mrs. Newton awoke in a hotel room near the docks, side by side with a merchant seaman who had just that day come in on a ship that had loaded cargo at Mazatlan.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Versions from Fyodor Tyutchev

The poetry of Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873) though slight in extent—he wrote some three hundred short pieces in all, of which perhaps one third are noteworthy—shows a distinction of mind, a delicate and intense awareness, commending him to Turgenev (his first editor), to Tolstoy who said that without this favourite poet life would be impossible, and to less likely admirers such as Mendeleev and Lenin. Yet the author of these justly celebrated poems distrusted his own talent and made no efforts to preserve them. Tyutchev spent his early manhood abroad, as a diplomat in Bavaria and Piedmont; on returning to Russia, he became a censor of foreign books. He was known to the world of fashion as a wit, an occasional writer on politics with pronounced Slavophil and conservative views, and an eccentric whose private life bordered on tragedy. He lived for a series of passionate attachments which alone gave meaning to his troubled existence. The poetry came from him in moments of divination, moments when he could pause from distraction and see into the heart of things. Nearly all the best of these flash with a sudden intuition of the transcendent—an instant held in its beauty and sometimes in its terror, absolute and precarious. Tyutchev is the poet of swift havoc and storm, of 'passing agitation' and destructive love: he sees nature as impenetrable to man alike in her hostility, her seasons of repose and kindliness, and her divine disregard of his crimes and aspirations. Tyutchev's sense of the marvellous never deserts him. Working with a rather small vocabulary on a set of recurrent perceptions, he gradually refined his art to a degree of concentration and flawless clarity which demand the strictest self-discipline in a translator.

Livonian Plains

I journeyed through Livonian plains:
A ground of gloom, a track of sand;
Thought, coloured by the toneless skies,
Turned inward by the dubious land.

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Those inner tracts, more wide than these,
Compounded from both time and place,
Flash with the shock of Teuton arms,
Of spurs that gore the suppliant face.

Coevals of that past, you trees,
Dumb witnesses, you riversides,
Your foliage and your silences
Have flowed from where its presence hides.

That other world releases you,
Spread from its borders to our own,
But you who know its mysteries,
Possessed of each, will hint at none.

Nature, in your equivocations,
Ambiguous, secret, you recall
That boy, who sees nocturnal rites
Whose morning silence guiles us all.

At the Imperial Village

Autumn advancing to the close,
That garden draws me: stilled
In its neither sleep nor waking,
The apparitional twilit white
As swanshapes, never breaking
The lake's dull calm,
Loom on its glass
In a delight of dumbness.

Shade settles there
On palace porphyry,
In the October early evening
Climbs Catherine's stair;
And, as the garden darkens like a wood,
Star-lit against its deepened ground
The past's gold image
Reflects from a still-emerging cupola.

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*

Bewitched by winter
Every firwood tree:
Mute, moveless under velvet snow
In shining singularity.

Bewitched, unliving
Yet not dead: they drown
In the sorcery of sleep
Held by a chain of down.

As the sun-slant breaks
No forest stirs:
A beauty that blinds
Explodes in glitters.

Spring: a formal ode

Wrinkled, but not inured by years,
Deceived by men, unmanned by fate,
By all that subjugates the mind
Or leaves the heart disconsolate,
However you may bear defeat
Or wrongs, in recollection, sting—
What can withstand the subtle breath
And first encounter of the spring?

Her laws are wayward, self-decreed,
Winged visitant whom none may sue—
The hour appointed, she descends
Unconscious of your woes and you:
No wrinkle in that shining, calm
Forehead of immortality,
Whose lucence and indifference
Befit the brow of deity.

As though it were the first of springs,
She scatters round her fresh increase;
If other springs have ventured here,

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No recollection breaks their peace:
She does not care: she only knows
These clouds are hers that sail so wide:
If flowers have shrivelled here before,
Her memory of that death has died.

Past being does not stir the rose
Nor Philomela with its fears;
Not for the past Aurora sheds
Her fragment, aromatic tears;
Their life, an ocean without bound,
No dread of what is yet to be
Invades this present certitude
Diffused by every leaf and tree.

Accept the absolute decree.
The senses tell you of decay?
Plunge deeper than their knowledge dares
When deity has led the way:
Entering this reviving stream,
Wash wounds beneath the season's spate,
And, though they be the moment's gift,
Among these quickening joys participate.

*

Above, the dissolving clouds
Lucent in heat. Glints
From its steel and steady mirror
Run with the river. Heat
Densened each hour, shade
Fled to the wood-cool under oaks,
And from the fields
White in their flowered and sunlit acres
The breath of honey.

Order perpetual
Governs this passing,
This changeless change
In fieldfare by riverflow.

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*

Night takes the distances
Ordained. And day, kind day
The comforter, must cede—
A dream dismissed, a gold cloth
Snatched aside that lay
On curtained chaos to supply our need:
The walls are down. All journeys lie
Through doors on dark that open into sky.

Orphaned by immensity,
Thought's as homeless now as we:
No stay past self,
No bound where mind may bring
Its glow and gauge
As shapeless night unbars our heritage.

*

Neither thought nor threat,
But a limp and sullen sleep
This night-sky gloom
Clouded from every quarter.
Only the intermittent flare as
Lightnings, deaf-mute demons
Converse with one another.

And now hangs lit
As by a preappointed sign
The whole stretch of sky,
Fields in the flash, far woods
Breaking from dark. They remerge
And the dark once more
Hushed, listens about them
As if it were aware
Of a decision taken
In the secret convocation
At the central height.

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Lutherans, I admire your liturgy,
Taught by austerity
In word and stone,
By clean-swept space
Among the pious walls.

But girded to go
(Look), faith before you
Between the threshold and that emptiness
Pauses, her house deserted.

Girded to go,
She waits, the door unshut
But the hour sounding. Kneel now
And for your final prayer.

The Past

(Tsarskoe selo—site of the imperial palace)

Place has its undertone. Not all
Is sun and surface.
There, where across the calm
Gold roofs stream in,
The lake detains the image:
Presence of past,
Breath of the celebrated dead.

Beneath the sun-gold
Lake currents glint . . . .
Past power, dreaming this trance of consummation,
Its sleep unbroken by
Voices of swans in passing agitation.

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RICHARD FOSTER

The Romanticism of the New Criticism

ALLEN TATE'S RETURN to orthodox Christianity a few years ago, juxtaposed with the instinctive romanticism of mind and sensibility revealed in his poems and essays, can be seen as a kind of symbolic salvation of the contemporary man of letters from the fateful prophesyings of Matthew Arnold. Arnold envisioned an "immense" future for poetry in the modern world, a future romantic in kind in that it discovered poetry rushing into those vacuums of the human spirit that had been left behind by the wasting and dying-out of orthodoxy and traditional culture under the pressure of modern science and secularism. The man of letters since Arnold has come to mistrust the romantic spirit generally—perhaps especially Arnold's romantic vision of poetry as quasi-religion. Of course, no one ever became a Christian for literary reasons—that is, to control his tendency to turn into a version of romantic. But people do become Christians in our time out of felt metaphysical need, and perhaps also out of a sense of guilt, though in time these distresses probably become translated into the intellectual terms of theology and its dependent ethical and social systems.

The felt metaphysical need has been strong among those critics we have learned to call the *New Critics*. As men in society they have been conscious of living in a wasteland, and many of them have responded to this awareness by embracing religious orthodoxy and the idea of the "traditional" society. But as men of letters, as critics and theorists of literature, they have responded in ways that imply denials of tradition and orthodoxy; in their criticism they have tended, in fact, to speak in the language of attitudes and concepts that the word "romantic" describes pretty accurately. With Tate's example shaping our view, then, orthodoxy can look like the abstract and public means by which the man of letters deals with his actual and private guilt—the intellectual guilt of romanticism. A way of controlling, perhaps, but also a way of

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expiating it: a penance consciously understood and willingly undertaken for sins of instinctive sensibility.

I am, of course, speaking metaphorically. I am making, however, a metaphor which seems to me to represent truly, perhaps to dramatize, an irony at the heart of one of the most important critical movements of our century. The irony consists in the split or the disparity between the critics' famous "traditional" or "reactionary" views as social commentators, and their markedly romantic, sometimes downright exotic, views as critics and theorists of literature. The chief intellectual sources of the New Criticism as a literary movement have in fact been romantic in kind—from Coleridge and the Germans through Bergson, Croce, and Whitehead to certain contemporary Idealist-related or Idealist-derived aestheticians like Susanne K. Langer, Eliseo Vivas, and Philip Wheelwright. With such roots it is no wonder that the chief fruit of New Critical theory—the doctrine of Poetry-as-Knowledge—should emerge as an essentially *un*orthodox, perhaps *anti*-orthodox principle. What the New Critics have done, seemingly against their own best intentions as traditionalists and anti-romantics, has been to supply the supporting systematic theology that was lacking in Arnold's merely amateurish and wistful yen for a religion of poetry.

I

The work of John Crowe Ransom is perhaps the most striking testimony to this theology-making impulse in the New Criticism. For he has devoted virtually his whole lifework as a critic to elucidating, through his texture-structure trope and its later restatement in the principle of the Concrete Universal, a version of the doctrine that poetry is knowledge. It is significant, in the first place, that Ransom has not stood still. He has, in fact, taken a small pilgrimage toward Truth in his thinking that expresses exactly the sort of religious flavor I am calling attention to here. For I think that "texture" and particulars received the main emphasis in his earlier essays, while "structure" and universals, the necessary complementary values, seem to have more importance in the essays after the thirties.

"Plato, Aristotle, the Hegelians, and many others related and unrelated," Ransom complained in *The World's Body*, "are quite alike in being unable to attach their interest to mere particulars,

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and disposed always to use them as the beginnings of a process destined to go 'higher,' 'behind,' or 'further'. . . . " This is an early statement of Ransom's general reaction against the abstraction of "uses," whether philosophical or pragmatic, from nature. And it would have specific application in criticism, obviously, to habitual critical or pedagogical quests for the moral and the meaning of the poem as sufficient ends. It was to thwart such abstractionism that the early Ransom preached on behalf of particulars, of nature as object to be loved for itself, of poetry or art as the flesh of experience filling out to completion the otherwise merely skeletal knowledges of science and conceptualization. Thus the idea that poetry discovers and provides "the world's body." A metaphor based on the standard romantic polarity of science and poetry—*the* metaphor, in fact, that had come so naturally to Wordsworth as he composed his prefatory remarks to *Lyrical Ballads:* "If the time should ever come," he wrote, "when what is now called science . . . shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration. . . . "

The body supplied by poetry Ransom called "texture," and the conceptual skeleton which it clothed and animated he called "structure." By the structure of a poem Ransom meant its meaning, its plot, its theme, its "paraphrasable content," along with its machineries of continuity and organization. By texture he meant all the engaging inclusions of the poem's art—its sound and its images—that interest us aesthetically after they have made whatever structural contribution they are capable of. Intellect very naturally became associated with structure, and feeling, as we might then expect, with texture. Ransom seemed to be trying to straddle this archetypal romantic split between feeling and intellect when he claimed, in *The New Criticism*, that for Coleridge images and feelings "are synonymous . . . in so far as they are one-to-one correspondents, one representing the cognitive side and the other the affective side of the same experience." This means that though an image may be said to be a cognition in that it "corresponds" to something in the real world and is in that sense "true," as Ransom put it elsewhere, "in the commonest sense of true: verifiable; based on observation"—it also engages our affections for itself on its own terms as a valuable

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object of sense experience over and above its service as a cognition.

Put most simply, then, an image or a poem may be both an object *understood* and an object *loved*. But since prose or scientific utterance—all other-than-poetic discourse—is by definition intended and taken as cognitive utterance, with its importance depending so exclusively upon what Ransom calls structure as ideally to exclude any intrusion of texture, texture becomes by logical default the defining characteristic of poetry. If texture makes the substantive difference, obviously feeling is going to make the psychological difference. Feeling—the psychological correspondent of texture—is going to be the distinctive poetic faculty to the relative exclusion of intellect as the prose faculty. Poetry, Ransom wrote in 1947, is "discourse in the 'pathetic mode' if we emphasize the feelings which attend it, but let us say loosely that it is in the 'substantival mode' if we emphasize the character of the referents." This seems to me very close to an open admission, softened by the nervous second clause, that Ransom's texture-structure theory inevitably implies the stock romantic split between poetry-and-feeling on the one hand and prose-and-intellect on the other.

But frankness alone was not enough to take care of two troublesome problems that necessarily arose from the texture-structure account of poetry's nature. The New Critics, and Ransom is no exception, have all along opposed themselves, with an almost moral fervor, to enforced sensibility-splitting of any sort. Nor have they been willing to accept poetic theories that handed knowledge to the sciences, leaving poetry with rights and duties pertaining only to stirring and satisfying the emotions. Ransom has shared with his fellow critics the desire to defend poetry's right to call itself "knowledge," and in his later criticism he implements that desire by merging his texture-structure metaphor with the idea of the "Concrete Universal." This is a rhetorical maneuver that seems to resolve dangerous dichotomies into unity and to restore to poetry an important share in the structure-knowledge-intellect cluster of values. Yet the poetry-as-knowledge doctrine has to be founded on a principle of uniqueness or else, as Francis Roellinger pointed out (*Southern Review*, 1942) about Ransom's earlier poetics, poetry as knowledge-through-particularity "becomes philosophy or science in concrete form" and "the attempt to assign an independent knowledge function to poetry breaks down." The strong

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objection to such a poetics, as Roellinger put it, was that "surely poetry must be a poor substitute for what our senses tell us much more immediately."[1]

The notion of the Concrete Universal is exactly the sort of refinement—whether or not it succeeds is another question—that attempts not only to claim a knowledge function for poetry, but to formulate that claim so as to avoid these objections by insuring the uniqueness of poetry and the consequent independence of its knowledge function from philosophy, science, and common sense. As stated in such essays as "The Literary Criticism of Aristotle" and "The Concrete Universal, Notes on the Understanding of Poetry," it is not the particular, but the *relation* of particular to universal that constitutes the knowledge uniquely presented by poetry. Ransom's theory proposes, to be brief, that the affectively interesting particulars of a poem have the same relation of residual logical irrelevance to its structure (meter, plot, paraphrasable meaning) as nature's particulars (the infinite variations of form, color, species) have to *its* structure (the machinery of energy and "matter," or perhaps the metaphysical finalities). The poem is itself a world "in little." And whether its subject matter be toads or angels, it *presents*, in the actualized relation between idea and detail, *ontological* knowledge of the world at large—knowledge in that a presumably true abstraction about the nature of reality could be based upon it. According to Ransom's theory, then, every true poem, as itself a world in little, is an instance of universal ontology presented and exemplified in a concretion.[2]

Most of the New Critics, when bent upon theorizing about the cognitive nature of poetry, have taken, like Ransom, extra-particular journeys toward their ends, though they have employed different verbal vehicles in doing so. Several share with Ransom the general conviction that poetry-as-knowledge is to mean,

[1]We may perhaps discern the unavailability of convincing defenses against such objections in Ransom's answer to the idea that a photograph may be fuller and more faithful to its object than a painting, if it is the *object* in all its textural richness and variety that is important. The photograph, Ransom somewhat weakly responded, is got by "actions so characterless that they indicate no attitude necessarily, no love; but the painting reveals the arduous pains of the artist" ("The Mimetic Principle," *The World's Body*). Which is quite another matter indeed.

[2]More recently Ransom has been describing the poem as having a "trinitarian" existence bringing together *three* worlds—the worlds of things, of intellectual abstraction, and of the "ideal"—rather than two worlds. But this refinement of the vehicle of Ransom's theory does not appear to change its tenor essentially. The theory still centers on the nature of the relationship between particulars and universals, even though the universals are seen now to be of two orders.

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specifically, poetry-as-ontological knowledge. Wellek and Warren, for example, in *Theory of Literature*, and Cleanth Brooks after them, accept the Kantian notion that there is a "structure of norms within reality," and that the poem makes it known by concretion in an actual formed experience. Blackmur, too, seems to hold the ontological view. But perhaps because of his interest in the "chthonic underside of things," reality for him has to do with turbulent and clashing forces rather than neatly structured norms. "Executive form," which is "art," and I quote from his essay on "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," has the business of providing "an instance of the feeling of what life is about," of making felt the underlying "deep" form of life, which is the force of the waywardness and turbulence of reality pushing against the ordering efforts of mind and conscience.

Poetry as ontological knowledge seems to shade off, in a critic like Blackmur, toward a second epistemological category which we may call, for convenience, axiological knowledge, knowledge of the sort talked "about" in the prose of religious, moral, and aesthetic precept, but presented in poetry as actual experience. "Poetry . . . is knowledge," Robert Penn Warren has written, not "by report," nor "as symptom" of an age, but "knowledge by form. No, knowledge *of* form." And for Allen Tate "works of literature . . . are the recurrent discovery of the human communion *as experience*, in a definite place and at a definite time."[3] The disvalues recognized in the contexts of both these assertions add up to materialism and secularized democracy. Perhaps we have the simplest and frankest statement of what this category of knowledge may amount to when Richards, in one of his more recent essays in *Speculative Instruments*, makes the old-fashioned sounding declaration that the humanities in general exist to cultivate "wisdom."

The third type of poetry-as-knowledge theory is a little harder to name. It is essentially a theory of poetry as psychological knowledge. And though "psychological" is now too drearily scientific a word to convey the mood of esoteric excitement in which some

[3]Compare Tate's statement in "Literature as Knowledge" that poetry is "complete" knowledge, but knowledge which is neither of "the world of verifiable science nor a projection of ourselves . . . . " I am not able to classify this conception with much conviction because I am unable to tell what he wants to mean; but it sounds more like an ontological knowledge than anything else. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., has recently objected to the "incarnation" theory of poetry suggested in the work of the converted Tate and certain other Catholic writers on the grounds that the theory is at best a mere metaphor: "It is a little less than making a structure of words a substance or even a good analogy to, or a dependent upon, a historical or personal incarnation."

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of its proponents speak, the theory is actually of a somewhat less ambitious order than the ontological and axiological ones so far announced. Mrs. Langer's elaboration of the theory, in *Philosophy in a New Key* and *Feeling and Form*, has had perhaps the widest vogue. An art work, she tells us in *Feeling and Form*, reveals some "nameless felt passage of 'felt life,' knowable through its incarnation in the art symbol even if the beholder has never felt it in his own flesh." Her principle is that art (she does not confine herself to poetry, or even to literature) presents for conscious experiencing and examination in objectified forms events of the subjective life—the life of "feeling" undergone but not understood, feeling perhaps wholly subconscious, even incipient, or even only potential. In short, art presents knowledge of the submerged psychological life. Her theory, akin to Blackmur's work particularly and of interest to the New Criticism in general (*Feeling and Form* was joyfully reviewed in *Kenyon Review* under the heading "This May Be the Book"), has been developed independently and with certain modifications by at least two other aestheticians who are themselves closely connected with the New Criticism—Eliseo Vivas in certain of his essays in the book *Creation and Discovery*, and Philip Wheelwright in *The Burning Fountain*. The theory also looks toward the emergent archetypalists—both more casual speculators like Kenneth Burke, and systematic theorists like Northrop Frye.

With these various subtle proposals before us we should recall that the classic or common sense view of poetry is that it is truth (moral or rational) wedded, by a special form of words, to pleasure. In our day T. S. Eliot, though he has certain philosophic criteria for "great" poetry, has been reasonably content to rest poetry's case on the pleasure principle. Yvor Winters has represented the other extreme, making his theory of poetry in the image of truth—prose-truth, or "rational" truth, that is poetically expressed. Winters has, in fact, declared his bafflement at the special use of the term "cognition" in Ransom's criticism: When applied to "the rational activities of scientists and philosophers," he observes, it tends to be "a term of disparagement"; but when applied to the arts "its meaning is different and to myself is very obscure." The reason for the obscurity is that the cognitive content of poetry, according to the poetry-as-knowledge principle underlying the work of most New Critics, is necessarily a knowledge different in kind from that derived by "reason" and observation.

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For with the foe, Science, before them, the New Critics have urged not only that poetry *has* a knowledge function, but that the knowledge available in poetry, as distinct from that of science and prose, is a *unique* knowledge, an *esoteric* knowledge perhaps, related less to the powers of reason than to the powers of intuition, of magic, even of revelation. The real importance of the poetry-as-knowledge doctrine as it has been expounded here, then, lies in its demonstration of where the search for such a theory is likely to lead when the knowledge is not to be prose-knowledge. Even if you begin as Ransom did with a respect and a love for particulars, you seem to get drawn in the transcendental footsteps of Aristotle, Plato, the Hegelians—and of course the great Romantic poets and critics of nineteenth-century England and America—where in the beginning you may have especially wanted *not* to go: "higher," "behind," or "further,"—or even, like Blackmur, "below." The New Critics are patently vulnerable, it seems to me, if their now more or less dormant academic opposition were fully to understand the philosophy they have built in support of literature's place in the modern world, to charges of supporting and nurturing an obvious form of "romanticism."

II

"Romantic" would seem to be about the worst name one could call a traditionalist-orthodoxist New Critic. It is the name New Critics themselves have given to loose art and loose morals, to adversaries who resist imagination and religion, to religionless moralism, to modern decadence in general. Does not the destructive force with which they themselves have endowed the word, when it is turned back upon themselves, propose to annihilate the value of their causes and achievements? Because of what I judge to be the very considerable importance, historical and otherwise, of the New Criticism, I think there is inherent interest, wholly apart from matters of judgment, simply in the *finding* of this ironic clash in it between sensibility and principle—or to put it another way, between romanticist literary theory and classicist moral and social theory. But in order to head off misuse of this finding, I should like to make some explicit judgments of my own of New Critics and their collective and individual achievements, and of the relation of those achievements to the romanticism.

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It is significant that when the New Critics are praised or blamed it is as often as not for their performance of activities essentially unrelated, or at best marginally related, to criticism in its restricted senses. They have been condemned for speculating and philosophizing, for writing "manifestoes," and for indulging in self-expression. But they have also been praised for their grace and wit and "subtlety," for the intelligence with which they pursue "general" problems, and for their "profoundly philosophical" minds. These two opposed judgments represent two implicitly opposed attitudes toward the type of criticism the New Critics have come more and more to practice: the free, more or less "impressionistic" *literary essay*, a type of criticism, ironically, that some years ago the New Critics taught us to be wary of. Among the major New Critics, only Cleanth Brooks comes to mind—though cases might also be made for the more discursive Empson and polemic Leavis—as giving most of his efforts to the selfless analysis of particular works (notwithstanding the service his analyses often additionally render as examples in support of theory). We have mostly general and "speculative" essays from the rest of the critics, essays that even when they begin with a text or corpus of texts will tend to spring away toward general considerations of the imagination, the ills of the modern world, the nature of poetry, even the nature of man and reality. The effect will often be of "personality" being realized in or obtruded into the essay through its mood of reflection and its expressive individuality of style.

Assuming the practical worth of selfless textual analysis, as performed by Brooks and the inheritors of his skills who write for many of the literary magazines and the better academic journals, I should like to defend the other voice of the New Criticism. Call it the "personal," the "impressionistic," the "speculative" voice; the voice that, though it speaks mostly of literature, ranges freely between philosophy and self-realization; the voice, in short, of the New Critic as old fashioned literary essayist.

Such a defense might very naturally begin on the grounds of the New Criticism's own doctrines against scientism and the antihumane worship of method: the literary essay, by its very looseness and tentativeness, preserves the mind's liberality, aliveness, responsiveness, and saves it from what Eliseo Vivas has dubbed "methodolatry." But there are better defenses, defenses based on what such essays have actually accomplished in the hands of New

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Critics. I. A. Richards, if we may regard him as a New Critic, or at least a father of New Critics, has really done very little as a practical critic, and very little more—though he has *written* a lot—as a theorist. He is essentially an essayist: a proposer, a maker of metaphors and striking hypotheses, a delightful and skilled rhetorician. Yet as essayist he has *motivated*—through his rhetorical settings of instances of man's educated inability to read—the modern critical revolution which is our inheritance. And he has *institutionalized* the key concepts of that revolution—"Imagination," the idea of the complexity of language's "meaning" as experience, and the bogey of "stock response," which fathered psychologistically the New Critics' definitions of poetry in terms of "irony," "paradox," "tension," "impurity"—largely through the pure fervor of his wonder at the ways of words. Because he was the first to say influentially what was wrong and what was needed, I think he deserves the recognition he now has—along with Eliot, the great rediscoverer of the literature of the past in terms of modern sensibility—as an established classic of modern criticism.

When one turns to the regular New Critics, perhaps one's first impulse is to declare that life is too short for so much generality. For there have been a great many fairly casual essayistic gestures toward "theory", by Tate, Penn Warren, Brooks, Blackmur, and Ransom, to name only the major people, as well as a few more systematic efforts of the same nature by Wimsatt, Wellek and Warren, and two or three related aestheticians. Most of these excursions into theory have been for the purpose of coming back with some definition of poetry, or of good poetry, and of its human importance. And most of them have yielded what, roughly, Richards calls "speculative instruments"—that is, metaphors by which to "see" or conceive or examine further into the nature of poetry. It seems to me that John Crowe Ransom's texture-structure dichotomy, with its refinement in the idea of the Concrete Universal, is the best of those speculative instruments advanced by the New Critics—or by Coleridge, or Coleridge via Richards. By locating the uniqueness of poetry in the relationship of generous and abundant excess that a poem's experienced detail sustains toward its rational meaning, Ransom has provided both a definition of the "nature" of poetry and of poetry's psychological reception by a proper reader. The poem has more detail than the meaning requires; and *because* of this we *care* for the poem beyond its use as

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meaning—which is what all the critics have really been assuming, even those who have protested Ransom's "inorganic" theory. This definition, besides clarifying our sense of what experiencing poetry is like, has the happy effect also of maintaining rather than reducing the status of its object. And in these days when the ambition is rampant to huddle all the arts indiscriminately together under one universal formula, Ransom's theory has the additional, and to my mind very important value of being formulated (Ransom's belief to the contrary) in such a way as to fit verbal art best if not exclusively. So Ransom's worth as a literary essayist, aside from the charm and wit of his essays as essays, I would judge to lie in his having constructed perhaps the sharpest and most accurate speculative—or persuasive or pedagogical—instrument in our contemporary criticism for the examination of the nature of poetry.

Tate has been spoken of almost as often as Ransom as a "philosopher" among New Critics. But I think that his essays seen as a whole are closer to Eliot than to the theoretical concerns of Ransom and Richards. One always feels the personality in Eliot's essays. It has its formal public face on, but behind that mask is a living sensibility, a cultivated intelligence, unfettered by "method," recording pretty immediately awarenesses and judgments as they come. In Tate the personality is more vivid, less formal—at least it *seems* so much less formal that the essays as a body take on the immediacy and drama almost of the confessional. As Tate himself very well realizes and, if we may believe his various prefaces, intends, the essays are the record of the progress of a mind. The overpowering sincerity of Tate's essays, even the ingenuousness of their more than occasional vanities and posturings, make something very special of them. Most of them cannot quite be called criticism. But they are something rarer, richer in substance finally than *pure* criticism—like Ransom's essays, something close to literature themselves: they are the biography of the conscience and sensibility of a deeply responsive and complicated man of letters in a peculiarly troubled time. And as that they create part of the myth of our time. Sometimes, in addition, they discover special and unforeseen responses to certain familiar writers—to Poe particularly, but also to Dante, Emily Dickinson, Dostoievski, and of course to Tate himself—that change one's own perception of them for good. Most of the essays are handsomely written, too.

Blackmur's criticism is also remarkable for the power, found

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occasionally in Tate, of creating or recreating one's mode of perception of some work or works. It is in fact this characteristic, understood as more vivid and radical in Blackmur's work than in Tate's, and as increased to many more instances, that I shall make the principal basis for arguing that Blackmur is the most important of the New Critics under discussion. Blackmur's peculiar genius has been not merely for analysis or exegesis of texts, but for actually readying and installing in his reader special variations of sensibility necessary for special understanding. Blackmur's earlier style, while never so direct and utilitarian as Brooks', was simpler than the later style about in proportion to his then stricter attention to specific texts. But even his earlier criticism was quite a different thing in its final intentions from "analysis." Though the earlier essays are full of the analytical work of explaining meanings and scrutinizing the effects of certain technical features of the poem, Blackmur always made these procedures subordinate steps toward the end of creating a mode of perceiving the special quality, an ability to receive the special experience provided in the work of a particular writer. In the 1931 essay on Wallace Stevens, for example, Blackmur contrasts Stevens' surface "nonsense" with the meaning-*less*ness of Cummings' language and with the special compressive techniques of meaning in Pound and Eliot; and then, by scrutiny of some "examples" of Wallace Stevens, inculcates an understanding of Stevens' own special method as one of seeing and accumulating ambiguities and pressing them to the point of virtual meaning. The principal technique is isolated, characterized, variously exemplified, and is thus made available to the reader as a technique of understanding or sensibility, paralleling Stevens' own, with which to surround and possess a poetry whose difficulty is assumed by the critic on behalf of the reader. This same, more than analytical intention—in the studies of Cummings' diction of sentimental unmeaning, of Marianne Moore's technique of the reduction of experience by idiosyncrasy and formalism, of Yeats' technique of conception by "magic"—informs most of the other earlier essays.

It informs the later essays, too, but its objective there is more complex. In the later essays sensibility is prepared and provided not merely for the appropriate reception of the works of a given writer, but also for a felt understanding of the disordered time in which we live, of the problems of artists generally and of particu-

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lar artists in our time, of what it is that the arts peculiarly "do" with reality, and finally of what essential reality itself is like as immediate unspeakable experience. All these themes may be distinguished, for example, in the long and exotically written essay on Eliot called "Unappeasable and Peregrine." It evokes a sense of our time as deprived of live and valid formative institutions like the Church. It presents the predicament of the artist in such a time in his necessarily make-shift and perhaps chaotic search for the forms and substance in which to create his experience, and delineates Eliot's special art, as a Christian convert, of *realizing* and *recreating* in poetry the substantial experience of the disused form to which he has personally reverted. It demonstrates that art in all times, but especially in our time of severance from the coherences of the past, is a way of compassing the disorder and flux of experience, of giving it form, of giving us location in it, perhaps even of discovering it for us. And it persuades, finally, working like successful art a suspension at least of disbelief, that there are depths and mysteries in experience—in "reality"—beyond prose and reason and graspable only by poetry and imagination. All these subjects are to a degree "talked about" in the essay on Eliot; but principally they are evoked, incanted into existence, made intuitively sensible to the reader if he reads successfully. A smaller and more accessible example of Blackmur's performance is this evocation of understanding for Yeats' "The Apparitions" in "W. B. Yeats: Between Myth and Philosophy":

> One tends to let poems stay too much as they are. Do they not actually change as they are read? Do they not, as we feel them intensely, fairly press for change on their own account? Not all poems, of course, but poems of this character, which engages possibility as *primum mobile* and last locomotive? Is not the precision of the poem a long way under the precision of the words? Do not the words involve their own opposites, not for contradiction but for development?

These rhetorical questions are not "analysis." But they are part of the almost poetic means by which Blackmur takes the reader into the poem. He also assists the reader to "ad-lib" the poem as Yeats ad-libbed it from the original given iota of insight, and one has the direct experience of how the poem might have gone differently at several junctures. The total effect of all this is to provide an approximate experience of processes of sensibility with which Yeats himself must have written the poem.

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This provision of multiple understandings "from within," so to speak, is the substance not only of the later essays on Yeats and Eliot, but of most of Blackmur's other essays of the forties and fifties. These later essays have a greater sameness about them than the earlier essays, for they all concern themselves with the more general themes of the modern world and the modern artist. But they are also crucially distinct, for each treatment of an individual writer—Mann, James, Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert—recreates something of the necessarily individual quality of sensibility needed to grasp the special and different ways each artist had of compassing reality. Mann's "diabolism" is a different thing from Flaubert's exorcising by objective fiction his subjective romantic demon. Such individuations continue to be a major concern of Blackmur's later efforts as a virtual poet of criticism. For that is what, on the whole, he is—a poet *creating* in his readers the semblance of the essential experience to come, more variously and copiously, in the poem proper. Like a poet he *renders* his subjects. Or, as he once said about himself, at the same time denying that his essays "expressed" either himself or a group or institution larger than himself, "I try to express what I am writing about."

We can say very frankly of Blackmur that though his later criticism contains analytical textual examinations, it is in bulk an evocative, insight-giving, impressionistic semi-poetry. Though he can be ludicrous or embarrassing or plain boring at times, I believe there is no critic within the New Criticism as here limited that can match him in sensitivity and catholicity and weight of accomplishment. Outside the New Criticism there is only Kenneth Burke, so like him in vitality and reach of imagination, so different in principle and performance.

Perhaps all "good" criticism, whether as analysis or literary essay, must be founded upon "sensibility"—the cultivated but free and untrammeled vision to see according to your living and natural lights what is before you, and to imagine, from what is given, what is not. This may almost be a description of the type of the poet. And it certainly smacks of romanticism, the interestingly ironic, the sometimes ridiculous, sometimes irritating romanticism of the New Critics, with their romantic occasions of style and effect, their grandiose beliefs about poetry's nature and power, and their amateur's enthusiastic idealism. But what have we as we look toward Chicago and the surviving memorials there of the

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only other important critical movement in the United States of the past twenty years? We have this from Elder Olson:

> By 'beauty' I mean the excellence of perceptible form in a composite continuum which is a whole; and by 'excellence of perceptible form' I mean the possession of perceptible magnitude in accordance with a mean determined by the whole as a whole of such-and-such quality, composed of such-and-such parts.

And this from Norman MacLean:

> The tragedy with depth is composed out of a profound conception of what is tragic and out of action tragically bent, with characters commensurate to the concept and the act—and, finally, it is composed out of writing.

Too often we have from the Neo-Aristotelians a kind of academic barbarism: a pseudophilosophic style of the classic color, derived, obviously, from bad translations of Aristotle. We have intellectual bathos and circular exterminations of meaning achieved only after the most elephantine laborings of diction and syntax. And these are high points—moments of definition and principle. We have, finally, in the place where sensibility ought to be, huge abstract machineries for the processing, packaging and labeling of literary produce. But after all the noise and exertion of its construction, the Neo-Aristotelian factory produced hardly anything—a lively essay or two against New Critics—and it now seems to have shut down altogether, though presumably it still stands firm.

Most of the major New and New-related Critics have been artists as well as critics—Ransom, Tate, Blackmur, Penn Warren, Empson, recently I. A. Richards, and even a poem or two of Brooks' has seen print—and around them have gathered some of the best young writers of the time. This may be a sign that what the Aristotelians lacked or thwarted in their perceptions of literature—a viableness of sensibility, a readiness for what Ransom has called "speculative fury," a susceptibility at bottom even to the romantic frenzy—is precisely what has kept the New Criticism alive, developing, fertile, a permanent influence in modern literature. It may even be that this basic romanticism of sensibility is the essential prerequisite, the ultimate fountainhead of a truly creative criticism. And perhaps accusations of romantic heresy are a tolerable enough scourge to bear for the privilege of such felicity.

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DOROTHY ROBERTS

Early Morning

The tool that is a stiff extension of the hand,
The light that comes slowly over the land,
The heat that lifts a sigh like a released soul,
The virtue that lies still in the log and coal,
The ship that holds a sail to the hard air,
The heavy shapes and their undoing in fire—

These find me in the morning and are sure
Of themselves in me, and me in them;
I do not know how else to have a day
That brings me out of the night and the uncertainty
And sets me up among things where I live.

By the soft hush of fire in the soul,
By the hard wind that shatters the personal role,
By the release of everything from dust,
I live in those hard things and the way they look,
I house my uncertain self in the star and stalk.

The Companions

I saw seventeen gravestones
Form a small heaven
In a lonely place on a hill
Away from life altogether.

Their position one to another
Was of companionship,
And they used the wind among them
To whisper it.

I am the tongue now, said stone,
And I am the leaner
Close to another for reply
When the wind blows over.

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HANS CAROSSA

Von Lust zu Lust

Liebe fordert letzte Beugung,
Und ich trau dem dunklen Rufe.
Noch im tiefen Graun der Zeugung
Fühl ich Sehnsucht, ahn ich Stufe.

Einmal muss ich Welle werden,
Muss im Rausch des Tiers zerfliessen.
Erst aus ganz gelösten Erden
Kann der Stern zusammenschiessen.

Seele rast hinab zum Schosse;
Dort wird sie von Lust verschlungen.
Auf den Geistern liegen grosse
Glühende Verfinsterungen.

Dann verebnen unsre Schauer,
Und ich darf zur Welt genesen.
Wer gezeugt hat, fällt in Trauer,
Aus der Trauer steight das Wesen.

Diesem stehn die Sphären offen;
Es zieht Leuchtkraft aus dem Trüben.
Mit Pleromas reinsten Stoffen
Wird es neue Zeugung üben.

Goldne Schlange, schnell vermodert
An der Wollust nacktem Strande,
Fliegt als Vogel, hell umlodert,
Ueber morgendlichem Lande.

Liebend lös ich mich vom Weibe,
Lass die Freudenflut verrinnen.
Den kristallnen Leib im Leibe
Lass ich langsam Glanz gewinnen.

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Translations by BARBARA GIBBS GOLFFING

Desire to Desire

Love demands the last unbending
And I heed the dark decree.
In the shudder of begetting
Yet are longing, yet degree.

Now I must become as water,
In the beasts' drug flow away.
Until stuff to atoms scatter
Shall no star together fly.

Wombward down the spirit rushes,
There is swallowed by desire;
On its faintness lie great flushes,
Darkness overshot with fire.

Then our shudders make us even;
To the world we turn our faces.
He is sad who has begotten;
Being from that sadness rises.

To it all the spheres stand open;
It draws radiance from gloom.
With pleroma's stuff is woven
New begetting from the womb.

Golden serpent, quickly withered
On the naked beach of play,
Lightly as a bird delivered
Flees across the growing day.

Loving part I from the woman,
Let sink down the flood of pleasure,
Let the body in the body
Crystallize and gather lustre.

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Fahrt

Wir Kinder gingen, Paar um Paar,
Durch Wald und grünes Reut.
Mit bunten Eierschalen war
Der Saatenrand bestreut.

Am Ufer hing das neue Boot;
Wir sassen flugs darin.
Das Wimpel wehte weiss und rot;
Die Strömung trug uns hin.

Das Land verschob sich von uns fort;
Zu Felsen stieg der Strand.
Geschmückte Menschen gingen dort,
Die winkten mit der Hand.

Und langsam schwanden Turm und Flur,
Nah rückte das Gestein.
Manchmal aus finstrer Höhle fuhr
Ein heimlich starker Schein.

Die Zeit verschwebte wie ein Hauch;
Ein Korb ward ausgeleert
Und nach geweihtem alten Brauch
Das Ostermahl verzehrt.

Wir assen Brot, wir tranken Wein.
Sturm schlug uns ins Gesicht.
Die Woge griff nach uns herein;
Wir fürchteten uns nicht.

Von weissen Vögeln weit umkreist,
Zur Heimat ging die Fahrt.
Wir glaubten selig an den Geist,
Der uns versprochen ward.[1]

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Journey

We children journeyed, two by two,
Through forests and green lands.
Bright eggshells strewn along the way
Bedecked the meadow-rands.

The new boat hung beside the shore;
We quickly sat us down.
The jack blew white and red before;
The current bore us on.

The land was quickly drawn away
Till rocks became the strand.
Men walking there in garments gay
Signalled with a hand.

Slowly tower and field went down;
The rocks were drawing nigh.
Often from darker hollows shone
Mysterious clarity.

The hours vanished like a breath;
A basket emptied out,
According to the ancient faith
The Easter meal was eat.

We ate the bread and drank the wine.
The storm beat on our heads.
The waves about us like a seine;
But we were unafraid.

Homeward again our journey passed,
With white birds circling heaven.
We trusted in the Holy Ghost,
The blessed promise given.

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FRANCIS GOLFFING

A Note on Hans Carossa

THE GERMAN POET and prose-writer, Hans Carossa, was born in Tölz an der Isar, in Upper Bavaria, on December 15, 1878. He studied medicine in the Universities of Munich, Würzburg and Leipzig, and in 1903 became a practising physician in Passau. Later he moved to Nürnberg, and in 1914 to Munich, where he continued to practice medicine until his death, September 12, 1956.

Carossa is the poet whose work most completely expresses the cultural fusion of the ancient Danube province of Upper Bavaria—a fusion of classical Roman, medieval Catholic, and German (pagan) traditions. Despite the highly wrought nature of both his poetry and prose, the elements of folklore are as integral a part of his preoccupations as is the Catholic ritual. He is, at the same time, the best German literary exponent of a world view characterized by *caritas* and tranquil wisdom. Averse from extreme positions, though aware of the shadows and shadiness of both public and private experience, his main impetus is toward the reconciling of opposites, but without attempting to gloss over or sidestep the difficulties of the task. In all his works we find a devout commitment to continuity—the chain of being that extends from inert matter, usually seen as crystalline rather than lumpish, to the highest organic manifestation, man, and beyond man to the spirit world. In following this chain, the intelligence must not miss a single link. As might be expected from these preoccupations, the pathos in the work is almost exclusively a pathos of *agape*, lovingkindness. *Eros*, with its dangerous possibilities, is either shied away from or seen as subserving the continuity of being.

Since Carossa was not a full-time writer, but a physician by profession, his output is relatively small. His chief publications are as follows: *Gedichte* (Poems), *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Collected Poems), last issue 1948; Autobiographical works: *Rumänisches Tagebuch*, *Eine Kindheit*, *Verwandlungen einer Jugend*, *Führung und Geleit*, *Das Jahr der Schönen Täuschungen*, *Ungleiche Welten* (the earliest 1922,

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the latest 1951); Fiction: *Der Arzt Gion*, 1931, and *Geheimnisse des Reifen Lebens*, 1936.

Carossa is almost unique among his German contemporaries in having divided his literary effort quite evenly between prose and verse. His prose works are all largely autobiographical; in them his double calling, of poet-healer, is projected at different levels. His lyrics are distinguished by emotional warmth and purity of style rather than grandeur or intensity. Their model, if they may be said to have a model, is the tranquil, slightly sententious poetry of the late Goethe. The forms are traditional, yet never derivative—stanza forms of rounded beauty but no special complexity. English-speaking readers might be interested to know that Carossa is the only German poet who has used the five-stress rhymed couplet in compositions of moderate length with signal success.

While at least three of Carossa's major prose works have been translated into English (published, I believe, only in Great Britain), his equally fine verse is still largely unknown outside Germany.

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HARRY BROWN

Portrait of a Lady

Be wary of her, Myth. I tell you this:
She's made your thousand agonies her own,
Had her white haunch with laurel overgrown,
Moaned as the black car clattered home to Dis,
And hacked a husband to a bloody monotone.

She, too, has loved one fretted on a sea,
Been played upon by uglier goats than Pan,
Gutted by friends on altars easterly,
Seduced by centaurs imitating man,
And heaved, poor artifact, a porous Niobe.

She has been often both love's gauge and gull,
Engroined with gold until she ran all gold,
Pinned like a pen until with cygnets full,
Kneaded by rams inside a randy fold,
A mad queen lathered by a lurching eager bull.

Be empty of her, Myth. Your mirrors lie
About her bright mosaic body still,
Noting that Protean rainbow landscape, high
As Sisyphus' reverberating hill
Or low as where green crabs enjoy a helmsman's eye.

Bearing her bleak ancestral images,
She journeyed to a wheaten virgin shore
And smashed them face by face. No temple whore
Spread on a porch in one of your spent dim ages
So heaved away her guilt, and none knew more.

Be gentle with her, Myth. I speak as one
Who bears his throat upon the evening tree,
Above the eaten children. Small tears run
Out of my eyes, which she alone may see,
Lover who shuns my music, as the sun,
To hear that drum, my heart, in mindless monody.

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ROBERT BRUSTEIN

Williams' Nebulous Nightmare

IN *Sweet Bird of Youth,* Tennessee Williams seems less concerned with dramatic verisimilitude than with communicating some hazy notions about such disparate items as Sex, Youth, Time, Corruption, Purity, Castration, Politics and The South. As a result, the action of the play is patently untrue, the language is flat and circumlocutory, the form disjointed and rambling, and the characters—possessing little coherence of their own—function only as a thin dressing for these bare thematic bones. Cavorting through the forest of his own unconscious, Williams has taken to playing hide-and-go-seek with reality in a manner which he does not always control. *Sweet Bird of Youth,* in consequence, contains the author's most disappointing writing since *Battle of Angels,* and frequently looks less like art than like some kind of confession and apology.

Even so, the confession might have assumed the dimensions of art if it were not so clearly that of a solipsist. About to be castrated, the play's hero, Chance Wayne, turns to the audience to ask for "the recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all!" Since Chance has had about as much universality as a character in an animated cartoon, to regard his experience as an illuminating reflection of the human condition is a notion which borders on the grotesque. For *Sweet Bird of Youth* is a highly private neurotic fantasy which takes place in a Terra Incognita quite remote from the terrain of the waking world. There all events have a mechanically sexual construction, everyone is caught up in extravagant depravity, success and failure alternate with astonishing swiftness, letters are sent but never delivered, and people not only get threatened with castration but have this threat executed and do nothing to avoid it when it actually comes. That this world is to be regarded as real or meaningful is a surprise sprung too often to promote much confidence in the author's vision.

The production, too, shakes one's confidence for it bakes the play in a gallimaufry of styles, part real, part fantastic. The acting, except for a splendid caricature by Geraldine Page (of a character generally peripheral to the action) is uncertain, and the direction, by Elia Kazan, is surprisingly mannered and hollow. Uncomfortably suspended between his traditional realism and a new theatricalism he is experimenting with, Kazan has underlined rather than disguised the play's defects. People act against each other as if alone in a room, but they also aim their remarks at the audience. Some of the business is pantomimed, and some is executed with real props. There is a phone on the stage but it is not attached by any wires, and the sets include real furniture but no walls. Thus Kazan unwittingly confirms a suspicion

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that the play, written in a predominantly realistic style, contains something disturbingly unreal; if Kazan's suspicion had been a conviction, it might have had more fortunate results. For, in the world of this play, it is no use pretending that time and space exist. The phone on the set is purely gratuitous when you have only to think bad thoughts in order to be heard, and all those thoughts are known anyway to the dark forces which plot your destruction.

In other words, the play is a nightmare, the disconcerting thing being that Williams is confusing his bad dreams with objective truth. The nightmarish element in Williams' recent drama has been fitfully apparent but his pretense at documenting reality has hitherto been less insistent. In *Garden District,* for example, one could ignore the occasional fib that the action was "a true story of our time and the world we live in" and enjoy the play as an extended sick joke (actualizing a homosexual metaphor—the invert hero of the narrative is literally "eaten" by the Spanish boys he has been seducing). But *Garden District* was mainly cast as a monologue, a Guignol horror tale told in the first person by a woman whose sanity is at least open to question. *Sweet Bird of Youth,* on the other hand, despite a few subjective soliloquies in the first act, is not narrated but dramatized and, consequently, is colored less by the fantasies of the characters than of the author. But if the play is a nightmare, the author does not always know he is asleep. In Strindberg's *Dream Play,* the artist took precedence over the sufferer and objectified the torment; in *Sweet Bird of Youth,* the sufferer's neurosis is dictating the play.

Thus Williams' nightmare does not, like Strindberg's, penetrate to a deeper subjective reality so much as distort, disfigure and disguise objective reality for its own purposes. The fantastic nature of the external action demonstrates this clearly. The play concerns a handsome blond gigolo of twenty-nine who has been exiled from his southern home town for some time through the machinations of the local political boss. Having now returned to St. Cloud in company with his latest keeper—an aging glamor queen named Ariadne Del Lago who keeps alive on a nourishing diet of sex, hashish, benzedrine and pure oxygen—Chance Wayne is greeted with antagonism and ominous warnings which he ignores. By an ostentatious display of borrowed wealth, Chance hopes to regain the hand of Heavenly, Boss Finley's daughter, who had been his mistress and true love at the age of fifteen. Since his "corruption" began only after Finley broke off the match, the recapturing of his "purity" and youth is contingent on her response to him; but he soon learns that Heavenly has had her organs removed after he unwittingly infected her with venereal disease some years ago. Rather than flee the town with the movie queen (who, in a twist of the plot, has staged a dramatic comeback), he remains to be castrated by the henchmen of Boss Finley.

The illogicalities of this plot suggest that, as in most dreams,

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the external action is only a metaphor providing clues to the hidden action. The play is about only two things consistently: time and emasculation. Four people lose their procreative organs: Chance is castrated, and so is a Negro mentioned casually in the second act; Heavenly undergoes a hysterectomy; and Ariadne Del Lago speaks of the castrating effect of age on women of her condition. Since emasculation for Ariadne Del Lago is figurative, a symbolic representation of sexual impotency, it probably has symbolic values for Chance Wayne too—after all, it is he who speaks most often of "the enemy, time." Yet, he can hardly be referring to impotency for he has not even reached thirty. That Chance's castration is metaphorical is clear but the difficulty lies in determining precisely what this metaphor is.

In a Christian context, the violence done to Chance is a punishment for his "corruption." Chance is unsuccessfully striving to return to his "clean, unashamed youth," a time when, according to a number of characters, he was the "sweetest," "finest," "cleanest," "most decent boy" in town. With Time and Boss Finley having worked manifold variations on his sexual purity, Chance has now emerged, in the full flush of original sin, as a "monster" and a contaminating influence on everything he touches. The corrupting agent, then, is experience, even life itself, and the sweet bird of youth is that same fowl mentioned in *Orpheus Descending:* an image of childhood innocence and grace before the fall which, by staying always in the sky, remains free from the corruptions of the earth. Since Chance, in his present fall from grace, has committed a grave offense against the bird, the removal of his sexual organs can be regarded as a form of poetic justice. Chance is guilty as charged and his punishment is deserved.

Unfortunately, this interpretation cannot be squared with the pagan implications of the play. The bird not only represents purity but—through a pun common in most Latin languages and even in children's English—the male sexual organ. If the bird is a phallic image, then Chance's sweetness and youth are associated with sexuality, not innocence, and his purity is terminated only when he is castrated, not when he turns to more perverse pleasures. Thus, it is Boss Finley who has offended against the bird; Chance has only advanced its pagan doctrine. In a non-Christian interpretation, Chance's fate is undeserved and reflects not Chance's guilt but the anti-sensual sadism of the man who perpetrated the violence.

These are not ambiguities but direct contradictions. They cannot be reconciled for they stem from Williams' irrepressible tendency to utter sexual affirmations through a Calvinist larynx. In more objectified plays, Williams could have it both ways by creating two characters each of whom embodied one aspect of sexuality: usually, a Christian-spiritual heroine and a pagan-physical hero. As his plays grow more personal, however, these elements become confused, and in *Sweet Bird of Youth* his central character buckles under both constructions of

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sexual behavior. At the same time that Chance Wayne sees himself as the apotheosis of depravity, he is the heroic rebel proudly articulating his contempt for the system. Thus, soon after he flagellates himself for corruption, he congratulates himself for his dedication to "love-making" in a world consumed by hate. Speaking in that circuitous mode peculiar to everyone in the play, he says:

> The greatest difference between people in this world is not between the rich and the poor or the good and the evil; the biggest of all differences in this world is between the ones that had or have pleasure in love and those who haven't and hadn't pleasure in love, but just watched it with envy—sick envy.

Since no one at this point bellows "Liar," we may take the statement as a theme, especially when we later learn that Chance's castration, apart from a punishment, is a sign that everyone is envious of his sexual powers.[1] Furthermore, Chance's dubious profession—a sign of his corruption—also indicates his sweetness of character: he claims he brought appreciation, understanding and tolerance to many lonely women. Chance, then, is the deformed Vulcan, the sensual Tristan, and the innocent Parsifal, and all at the same time. Depending on whether Williams is viewing sex as salvation or sin, Chance is represented alternately as both the purest and most depraved character in the play, and there is even a suggestion, through some fancy Easter Sunday symbolism borrowed from *Orpheus Descending*, that he is to be identified with Christ!

Sweet Bird of Youth, in short, is the kind of work Graham Greene might have produced if he tried to write like D. H. Lawrence: it embodies Chance's confession of guilt, his apology for it, and his exaltation of it. The pagan element in the play, however, seems to me the spurious one, a literary smoke screen spread over the dream to hide its true content. Let us examine the action from a different perspective to explain some of its contradictions.

It is significant that Williams labors hard to exculpate Chance; he is made to bear little responsibility for his situation. When Chance maneuvered the fifteen year old Heavenly into a Pullman car, it was he who said "no," she who said "yes." More important, Chance was completely free from taint until Boss Finley's villainous prohibitions forced him into a life of lust. In an earlier draft of the play—published in *Esquire*—he is even innocent of infecting Heavenly since she contracted syphilis after participating (against *her* will!) in an orgy which Chance did not attend. Chance is surely a peculiarly blameless sinner,

[1] When the Negro is castrated, Chance identifies with him: "Sex-envy is what that is, and the revenge for sex-envy which is a widespread disease that I have run into personally too often for me to doubt its existence . . . . For some reason hate-makin' is easier than love-makin'." In addition, Boss Finley's villainies are partly attributed to the fact that he is now "too old to cut the mustard."

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but a sinner he is nevertheless—punished for having engaged in a forbidden act of sexuality.

It is interesting that most of Williams' heroes and heroines, also more sinned against than sinning, have been visited with physical and mental mutilations as a reward for their sexual transgressions. Declaring their innocence to the end, they have been lamed, eaten alive, burned, threatened with lobotomies and driven mad. The hero to whom Chance Wayne bears the closest resemblance—Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending*—is set upon by dogs and torn apart after reluctantly having been seduced by the villain's wife.

Williams' central theme, then, concerns a hero (or heroine)—once "pure," now "corrupted" by the dark masculine forces of society—who gets involved sexually with a willing and sometimes aggressive female (or male). As a result of this encounter, the central character is mutilated or destroyed by an avenging and sadistic male, usually a relative. If we regard these mutilations as symbolic castrations and make the obvious substitutions, the theme emerges as a Freudian melodrama embodying the classical Oedipal situation: Big Daddy punishes his sensitive child for lusting after abnormal delights. Although these perversions are variously suggested—as nymphomania, male prostitution, homosexuality, adultery and sodomy—these too are metaphors. For Freud, the castration fantasy was invariably a punishment for incestuous desires. It is Williams' obsessive fascination and horror over this theme that accounts, I think, for the alternating defiance and self-hatred of his heroes—and for his desire to exonerate them at the very moment they are proven guilty. In the Freudian fantasy, every man is both innocent and guilty of the crimes for which he imagines himself punished, since the wish is always confounded with the deed.

If the play were simply a Freudian fantasy, and straightforwardly offered as such, it might have achieved some of that universality that Williams claims for it now. For if the dreamer, Chance, is—as one character calls him—an innocent lost in the "bean-stalk country," it follows that Boss Finley is the "flesh-hungry, blood-thirsty ogre" who pursues him. In the sex nightmare, the evil father is frequently black and threatening, and one can accept an antagonist as starkly one-dimensional as the villainous figure Sidney Blackmer gropes to find a character for on the stage.[2]

But in confusing his nightmare with actuality, Williams has created a wholly fraudulent conflict. To make Boss Finley anything as substantial as a segregationist is to wrap a neurotic fantasy in a social document. The repressive, castrating father can, if he is generalized enough, represent all conventional authority and morality, as he often

[2] Aside from his penchant for castrating everyone in sight, Boss Finley has raped his own wife, displays incestuous desire for his daughter, and possesses fantastic delusions of grandeur.

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does in Expressionist drama. But with Boss Finley as a racist, the conflict is specified in a topical manner calculated to win approval from a liberal audience which otherwise might have some reluctance to accept the sexual conflict underneath. Boss Finley is a device to divert the spectator's attention from the fact that *his* morality is being criticized by playing on certain of his prepared responses towards the South.

It doesn't work. The segregationist themes emerge as mindless and unreal, and Boss Finley bears no resemblance to anything on land or sea. Granted that the South is the one area in America which most resembles ogre country—the one area where castration is likely to take place—it simply would never happen to a white man, especially one in "the genteel tradition." For Finley to have any coherence as a racist, Chance would have had to be a Negro and Williams would have been forced to write another play.[3] As it now stands, the contemporary southern setting of the play is a trick to insure a Broadway success by enlisting the audience's sympathy on the safe side of a conflict which has no basis in truth.

But it is useless to document any further the evasions and contradictions of this inferior work. If it has a single virtue, it is in its uniqueness—no one but Williams could have created it. But the wild and fertile imagination which conceives has far outstripped the mind which shapes. With his fancy leading him into areas which he does not seem completely able to enter or leave, Williams is losing his ability to examine either the internal or external worlds with any real penetration. Williams has been often criticized for his sensationalism, but I find him still not sensational enough, for there is nothing more daring than the truth. He continues to disguise his true sexual concerns much as Miller obscures his political themes; and O'Neill remains the only American dramatist who has doggedly pursued his furies to their lair. There is a place in our drama for the nightmare and no one seems more qualified than Williams to write a good one. But his work will founder in formlessness, incoherence and dishonesty if he does not soon prove himself the master of his dreams.

[3] Parts of that other play are scattered through this one, for Williams sometimes seems to realize that Chance makes no sense as a white. Why did Finley break off his match with Heavenly when Chance was once the town's white-haired boy? Why is there a parallel—and irrelevant—castration of a Negro in the course of the play? What do Finley's frequently uttered fears about "the threat of desegregation to white woman's chastity in the South" have to do with Chance and Heavenly? And, finally, why does Finley say that the Supreme Court would find a "handsome young criminal degenerate like Chance Wayne . . . the mental an' moral equal of any white man in the country." Even a racist wouldn't say this if Chance were not a Negro. Clearly, the sexual and social plots bear very little relation to each other.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

TURNING ON THE RADIO for a Metropolitan Opera broadcast a few years ago, I was astonished to hear the Overture to *Don Pasquale* being paced and shaped by Thomas Schippers with exactly the right style of plasticity and continuous tension for this Italian work—astonished, because it was hard to imagine when and where this style had been acquired by a very young man from Kalamazoo. This year the performance of Verdi's *Ballo in Maschera* that I heard Schippers conduct at the Metropolitan was the fifth of the season, after an interval of some weeks, with Jan Peerce taking over as Riccardo—all enough to account for the less than completely exact execution and gearing of singers with orchestra, and as a result the less sharp outlines and less powerful tension, that I heard this time. Nevertheless the performance exhibited again Schippers' feeling for plasticity and continuity and for the dramatic power of the music at certain points—which is to say that it was an effectively conducted performance that confirmed earlier impressions of his gifts. For the rest, there was good singing by Peerce, Robert Merrill, Antonietta Stella, Laurel Hurley and Jean Madeira; the 1940 scenery of Mstislav Dobujinsky and costumes of Ladislas Czettel were adequate; the staging by Hans Busch included absurdities that could have been avoided, and others that were part of the basic and complete dramatic absurdity of the libretto, one of those jobs of nonsense that provided Verdi with situations now of love, now of hate, now of gaiety, now of menace, for which he produced the required varieties of music—in the case of *Un Ballo in Maschera* often superb music.

The powers evident in this product of Verdi's maturity manifest themselves in the comparatively early *Macbeth,* where one hears the conventional styles of the period in a chorus of witches or assassins or a cabaletta that is laughably unsuited to its expressive purpose, but also hears Verdi operating creatively and eloquently in his own style and carrying it to incandescence in the sustained vocal invention and the developing orchestral figure of the Sleepwalking Scene, which is as remarkable as anything he achieved later. This makes *Macbeth* a work which the Metropolitan should have produced long before 1959; and while it is true that the role of Lady Macbeth demands a combination of vocal range, agility and power and dramatic intensity that isn't often encountered, it is also true that the Metropolitan has had singers with this equipment—for example, Elena Nikolaidi when she first came here. What it has lacked in the past is the spirit of enterprise that is perhaps Mr. Bing's most valuable asset, and that led him now to produce *Macbeth* when he had the

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singer it required. This singer originally was Maria Callas, whose vocal powers, peculiarities and weaknesses—not only her range, agility and power but the strangely beautiful timbre of her lower voice and even her unpleasantly shrill high notes—made her the predestined singer for Lady Macbeth. But she was dismissed, allegedly for reasons which did not, in my opinion, constitute justification of the action: her decision not to sing *La Traviata* in alternation with *Macbeth* was the sort of thing that happens in opera companies all the time, and the sort of thing that is always handled and settled by private persuasion and mutual accommodation, not by public martinet-like assertion of power that Mr. Bing seems to like to indulge in when he can (when he can't—when he has to accept demands by a singer he needs—he doesn't proclaim it in the newspapers).

The dismissal deprived the production of the extraordinary Lady Macbeth that Callas would have given it; however Leonie Rysanek has a voice of great beauty and power in the high range that is employed so much in *Macbeth,* and used this voice with dramatic expressiveness that made her vocal performance in the role highly impressive in spite of the weakness of her lower range. Impressive too was Leonard Warren's singing in the title role; and the work had all the effect that good singing could give it. But as a dramatic figure on the stage Warren was a portly and wooden nullity; and Rysanek's crouches, dashes and whirls projected no inner dramatic force. In addition the designer, Caspar Neher, had the unfortunate idea of providing costumes and some of the scenery in light colors which were not in harmony with the somber character of the drama and the music. And though most of Carl Ebert's staging was good, the use of one setting for the last two scenes resulted in Macbeth's hearing the women's cries at Lady Macbeth's death not as he sat in an adjoining room in the castle but as he stood on a plain outside the castle. The New York City Opera's far less expensive 1957 production of *Macbeth* had more dramatically effective scenery and costumes by Andreas Nomikos; it had in Irene Jordan a Lady Macbeth who sang and acted with exciting dramatic force; and it was conducted by Arturo Basile with a stronger feeling for idiomatic plasticity and tension than Erich Leinsdorf's.

Even Mr. Bing took almost ten years to produce Alban Berg's *Wozzeck,* which the Metropolitan should have produced twenty-five years ago. But the Metropolitan of the appalling last Gatti-Casazza years wasn't equipped to give a presentable performance of this enormously difficult work; and Mr. Bing may have had to wait the almost ten years for the combination of artistic resources and other circumstances—e.g. the possibility of giving the work an unheard-of amount of rehearsal time—that enabled him to offer it in one of the most distinguished productions in the Metropolitan's history. Moreover, twenty-five years ago many of the now white-haired Metropolitan subscribers would have walked out after the first act; whereas now they

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stayed to the end and applauded and cheered—if not in approval of the discordant music that so powerfully supported the nightmarish drama, then certainly in appreciation of what was done with the work on the stage and in the pit. Done, most obviously, by the singing actors—by Paul Franke as the Captain, Eleanor Steber as Marie, and most impressively by Hermann Uhde in the title role, with his power of presence and projection even in immobile silence; and done also by the orchestra, by Karl Böhm who conducted the superb realization of the musical score, by Herbert Graf who produced the at times brilliantly effective realization of the dramatic action on the stage, by Caspar Neher who provided the scenery that worked so well with the action and in the quick changes of scene.

Mr. Bing's spirit of enterprise is somewhat indiscriminate and occasionally leads him to disaster; and this year's disaster was his presentation of the Metropolitan's ballet company as an independent entity in a program of four new ballets. He acted on assumptions contrary to fact—assumptions that the Metropolitan had a ballet group comparable with those of the great European opera companies, and that brilliant choreographies were to be had for the commissioning; the reality being that it could offer only a callow little group with a few guest soloists, and ballets which exhibited John Butler's and Herbert Ross's straining for ingenuities that it would have been better not to achieve, Alexandra Danilova's inoffensively pointless sequences of classical steps, and Antony Tudor's mechanical repetitions of the few mannerisms that are all he can produce now.

Reporting on the works presented in the New York City Opera's first season of American opera a year ago, I said that all, in their various ways, had captured and held attention with the dramatic happenings on the stage, not with the music, which had in no instance exhibited the operation of an original creative mind, but had instead been only a more or a less expert employment of a variety of existing idioms and styles in support of the texts. But for Winthrop Sargeant, among other reviewers, the season was a milestone in the history of American music in that it revealed—most impressively in Douglas Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe,* Vittorio Giannini's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*—a rich sprouting of genuine American opera whose further growth required more of the financial support that the Ford Foundation had provided for the season. And the Foundation, thus assured of the excitingly beneficial effect of its first grant, came through with a second this year that enabled the New York City Company to put on another American season in which Sargeant heard further evidence of the burgeoning of the new development in American music that will no doubt persuade the Foundation to make a grant for a third season next year and so on. (In addition the director of the New York City Company received from Columbia

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University, where Douglas Moore is a professor, the Ditson award for his service to American opera, which included producing this year, in addition to *The Ballad of Baby Doe,* Moore's even feebler *The Devil and Daniel Webster.*)

Believe, if you will, Sargeant's contention that the New York City Company this year presented additions to a corpus of distinguished achievement in American opera; or believe me when I say that Menotti's *Maria Golovin* offered the usual Menotti pastiche of musical trash in the service of the usual Menotti dramatic claptrap; that Floyd's "modern" writing in this year's *Wuthering Heights* was no better in quality and no more adequate for its dramatic purpose than his traditional writing in *Susannah*; that Robert Ward merely operated with more expertness in his manipulation of unoriginal materials in *He Who Gets Slapped*; that Hugo Weisgall's "modern"-style writing in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was unpleasant-sounding as well as expressively and otherwise worthless; and that the expressive connotations of Kurt Weill's musical-show-style writing were inconsistent with the serious dramatic action in *Street Scene* this year as in *Lost in the Stars* last year.

Nor did the company err only in what it presented. This year as last its presentation of American achievement in opera omitted the one musically distinguished American work ever produced by the company itself, Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land,* and two other distinguished American works, Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All.*

As for the American Opera Society, it ended its season with a repetition of Cherubini's *Medea* with Eileen Farrell. What made the first performance a few years ago sensational was the unfailing and breathtaking beauty of her voice and the expressive force of her long-breathed phrasing in the taxing music of the title role; and this time, though her *mezza voce* was often ear-ravishing and her full voice thrilling in some moments of maximum power and splendor, there were other moments when the sounds she produced were not beautiful. For the rest there was good singing by Judith Raskin, Claramae Turner and Richard Lewis, but Morley Meredith's dry and hollow voice imparted no force to the music of Creon; and Arnold Gamson conducted well, but the orchestra was too small for the powerfully expressive orchestral writing to have in Carnegie Hall the effect it had had in Town Hall. I was this time aware of the excessive cutting of the work; and though Professor Paul Henry Lang rarely says anything I find worth reading he was right in contending that this French opera should not be performed in an Italian translation and with the recitatives added by a German composer.

Glenn Gould's Carnegie Hall recital confirmed the impression I had got from his records—that this young Canadian stands out above all

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other pianists young and old. The playing style, with its powerful note-to-note continuity of shape and tension, is like no other. So is what it produces—the object in sound completely formed and completely achieved to the exact sonority of the last note. And so are the powers it reveals—the intellectual power with which the forming of the object begins, the technical mastery with which the extraordinarily fine and exact graduations of tone are achieved. The piece may be a dull one, or the object he makes of a great one may be unconvincing and unacceptable as a realization of the work; but the intellect and the mastery exhibited in the operation command interest and respect: one's mind is seized by the very first sounds, with their electrifying authority and force, and is held fascinated by the continuing coming into existence of the remainder of the musical object.

A couple of years ago Alexandra Danilova gave her impression of the Bolshoi Ballet, which she had seen in London: "Every member of the corps de ballet is a ballerina—the arms—everything! But the style of the dancing, the style of the productions, the scenery and costumes are from fifty years ago—like from a museum!" This was confirmed, in the *Giselle* that was the one work I saw performed by the Bolshoi at the Metropolitan, by the corps whose beautiful and precise execution of the dance of the Wilis elicited cheers from the audience; and on the other hand by the tastelessly lavish costumes of some of the noble ladies in the hunting party that Danilova may have had in mind as being "from fifty years ago—like from a museum."

Whatever may be said about continuing to use styles of the past in new works, it seems to me arguable that an old ballet like *Giselle* might legitimately be given a museum-style production which preserved its original form and style—as a nineteenth-century novel is published today, or a nineteenth-century painting is exhibited, in its original state. But in any case certain museum-like features of the Bolshoi *Giselle* were admirable. Thus, even before the curtain rose I found myself hearing for the first time an extensive musical prelude which was only one of a number of passages of music that I had never heard in other performances; and with some of these I saw dance episodes that I had never seen, including an extensive pas de deux of two villagers in the first act. On the other hand the detailed choreography of an old ballet is something that hasn't been preserved and can't be reproduced exactly; and the choreography of the Bolshoi *Giselle* as reconstructed by the Bolshoi's principal choreographer, Leonid Lavrosky, differed constantly in dance detail from what we have seen in other performances—most vividly in the second-act lifts in which Albrecht raised Giselle in spectacular fashion to a position over his head. I recall seeing these lifts also in the film of Lavrosky's *Romeo and Juliet*, and nowhere else; as far as I know, then, they are an invention of his—one which for me represents the present-day Russian

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style of the portentously gigantesque that was to be seen in much of *Romeo and Juliet*; and this contemporary detail was a false note in *Giselle*.

The lifts and the costumes were flaws; but they counted for little in the total beautiful and secure operation. At the heart of it—and always *of* it at the same time that she was a creature apart in force of presence and loveliness and eloquence of movement—was Galina Ulanova, whose performance placed her with the greats we have seen, including Markova in her first years with Ballet Theatre. And as something achieved by a woman of forty-nine, and done with complete involvement of self, it shamed Markova who at a much earlier age began giving less and less of herself in smaller, and smaller-scaled, performances.

As for the New York City Ballet's May-June season, it presented Balanchine's new ballet to music of Von Webern, on which I will report later.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND

The Seventh Seal: The Film as Iconography

ASIDE FROM GIVING US a masterpiece, Ingmar Bergman in *The Seventh Seal*[1] has created a strange and wonderful paradox: a singularly modern medium treated in a singularly unmodern style—a medieval film. It is medieval in the trivial sense of being set in Sweden of the fourteenth century. More important, *The Seventh Seal* is a traditional *Totentanz* in which the allegorical figure of Death, robed in black like a monk, carrying scythe and hour-glass, leads the characters away in a dancing line under the dark, stormy sky. Most important, Bergman shows us, as medieval artists did, an allegorical, iconic reality, in Erich Auerbach's term, a figural reality which can be understood only by seeing that it prefigures something beyond itself. "My intention," Bergman writes in a note to the film, "has been to paint in the same way as the medieval church painter," and lo and behold! he has done just exactly that.

The Seventh Seal deals with a Crusader's quest, not in some faraway

[1] *Det Sjunde Inseglet*. Written and directed by Ingmar Bergman. Production Ab Svensk Filmindustri. Photography: Gunnar Fischer. Music: Eric Nordgren. In my fascination for iconographics, I should not neglect to say that the photography and acting were flawless: notably, Max von Sydow who played the Crusader; Nils Poppe (Sweden's most popular comedian), Jof; Bengt Ekerot, Death; Gunnar Björnstrand, the squire; and the lovely Bibi Andersson as Mia.

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Holy Land, but in his own fourteenth-century Sweden. After ten years of holy war, the Crusader has returned home, weary, bitter, and disillusioned. On the shore, the ominous figure of Death steps out of a series of striking dissolves to claim him. The Crusader delays, however; he challenges Death to a game of chess. If the Crusader wins, he escapes Death; so long as the game goes on, he is free to continue his quest for certain knowledge of God and to do one significant act during his lifetime. As Death and the Crusader play at intervals through the film, the knight moves on a pilgrimage through Sweden, the land itself ravaged by the Black Death.

Bergman has in mind some obvious modern parallels to his medieval characters: "Their terror is the plague, Judgment Day, the star whose name is Wormwood. Our fear is of another kind but our words are the same. Our question remains." Our plague is intimate, as theirs was, and we too have our soldiers and priests, or as Bergman has called them, "communism and catholicism, two -isms at the sight of which the pure-hearted individualist is obliged to put out all his warning flags." Yet it would unnecessarily limit the universality of Bergman's achievement to call *The Seventh Seal* merely a necroterpsichorean parable for modern times. All men everywhere have always lived with death. Bergman is going beyond the *Totentanz,* trying to answer the further question: If death is the only certainty, where is God?

The Crusader's quest gives us the answer, though the knight himself seems never to learn it—or to learn that he has learned it. Accompanied by his positivistic, materialistic squire, a foil to his own abstractly questioning nature, he looks for certainty about God, for "to believe without knowledge is to love someone in the dark who never answers." Yet what the Crusader finds at first are people who believe in God only as a scourge, the cause of plagues and death, and who respond in kind. Religion for them becomes suppression, cruelty, persecution, the burning of innocent girls as witches, the terrifying realism of the crucifixes in the peasants' churches. In one of the most horrifying scenes ever put on film, Bergman shows us a procession of flagellants: a line of half-naked men lashing one another; monks struggling under the weight of huge crosses or with aching arms holding skulls over their bowed heads; the faces of children who wear crowns of thorns; people walking barefoot or hobbling on their knees; a great gaunt woman whose countenance is sheer blankness; slow tears falling down the cheeks of a lovely young girl who smiles in her ecstasy of masochism. The procession interrupts the gay skit of a group of strolling players and halts while a mad priest screams abuse at the ugliness of his audience, long nose or fat body or goat's face. Glutted with hate, he joyfully proclaims the wrath of God, and the procession resumes its dogged way over the parched, lifeless soil.

Such is religion, Bergman seems to say, to those who see God as hater of life. Art (as represented by a surly, tippling church painter)

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becomes the representation of death to gratify the people's lust for fear. Living, as shown in a grotesque scene in an inn, becomes a sardonic "Eat, drink, and be merry." Cinematically, Bergman identifies this side of the ledger by great areas of blackness in the film frame and often by slow, sombre dissolves from shot to shot. Musically, the sound track treats even scenes of merrymaking with the *Dies Irae* theme.

In his notes to the film, Bergman tells how,

> As a child I was sometimes allowed to accompany my father when he traveled about to preach in the small country churches .... While Father preached away .... I devoted my interest to the church's mysterious world of low arches, thick walls, the smell of eternity, ... the strangest vegetation of medieval paintings and carved figures on ceiling and walls. There was everything that one's imagination could desire: angels, saints ... frightening animals ... All this was surrounded by a heavenly, earthly, and subterranean landscape of a strange yet familiar beauty. In a wood sat Death, playing chess with the Crusader. Clutching the branch of a tree was a naked man with staring eyes, while down below stood Death, sawing away to his heart's content. Across gentle hills Death led the final dance toward the dark lands.
>
> But in the other arch the Holy Virgin was walking in a rose-garden, supporting the Child's faltering steps, and her hands were those of a peasant woman .... I defended myself against the dimly sensed drama that was enacted in the crucifixion picture in the chancel. My mind was stunned by the extreme cruelty and the extreme suffering.

The Seventh Seal finds God for us—or at least another certainty than Death—not in the wormwood-and-gall institutional religion of suffering and crucifixion, but in the simple life of a strolling actor and juggler named Jof (Joseph), his girl-wife Mia (Mary), and their baby. As if to make the parallel to the Holy Family even more clear, Jof plays the cuckold in the troupe's little Pierrot-Columbine skit. Jof is also the artist. He is given to visions, and Bergman shows us one, of "the Holy Virgin . . . supporting the Child's faltering steps." Except for the Crusader, Jof is the only one who can see the allegorical figure of Death. (To the Crusader's materialistic squire, for example, Death appears not as an iconic figure, but as a grisly, rotting corpse.) Jof is a maker of songs whose simple melodies provide the sound track for this side of the religious ledger. Cinematically, Bergman gives us the certainty and holiness of life represented by Jof's family in light, airy frames; quick cuts tend to replace the slow dissolves used for the religion of death.

Yet even innocent Jof can be converted to a thief and a buffoon by the death-forces. In the grotesque comic scene at the inn, he is tortured with flames, forced to jump up and down on the board table in an

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exhausting imitation of a bear, parodying his own ability to leap beyond the ordinary human. An artist stifled in his art, he responds by becoming a rogue; he steals a bracelet as he makes his getaway.

This grim *reductio ad absurdum* proves, as it were, that death and the religion of death cannot be the only certainty. As a mad young girl about to be burned for a witch tells the Crusader, you find God (or the Devil who implies God) in the eyes of another human being. But the abstractly questioning Crusader says he sees only terror. He seems for a moment to find his certainty of God in a meal of wild strawberries and cream handed him by the gentle Mia, in effect, a communion of life as opposed to the bread and wine consecrated to Death. (Strawberries are associated with the Virgin in some late northern iconography.) The Crusader seems also to find his "one significant act": he performs the service of the knight traditional to medieval art, not the colonizer of the Holy Land, but the protector of the Holy Family. He leads Jof, Mia, and the child through the dark wood. As he plays chess with Death, he sees that the visionary Jof has recognized the Black One, seen his family's danger, and is trying to escape. To help him, the knight busies Death by knocking over the chessmen, incidentally giving Death a chance to cheat and win. By losing the game, the knight gives up his life to let Jof and Mia escape (in a tumultuous, stormy scene like paintings of the flight to Egypt).

And yet, though the Crusader has pointed the way for the audience, he seems not to have found it for himself. He goes on in his quest for abstract answers. He leads the rest of his now doomed band, a smith, the smith's venereous wife, the squire, and the squire's mute "housekeeper" to his castle. There, in a curiously emotionless scene, the Crusader distantly greets his wife whom he has not seen for ten years, shows her his disillusionment, but says he is not sorry he went on his quest. With the chess game lost and Death near, he knows it is too late for him now to act out the importance of the family himself, but he has learned its worth, though he does not realize its full godly significance. As his wife reads the lurid images of Revelation viii: "And when he had opened the seventh seal," Death, whom they all seem to await, appears. The Crusader asks once more that God prove himself. The mute girl opens her mouth and speaks, "It is finished," the sixth of the seven last words from the Cross. Death gathers them all in, his cloak filling the screen with black.

In short, then, the film answers its question, If Death is the only certainty, where is God? by saying, You find God in life. The opening shots of the film set up the contrast: first a blank empty sky; then the same sky but with a single bird hovering against the wind. Life takes meaning from its opposition to death, just as Jof and Mia's simple love of life takes meaning from the love of death around them—or as a chess game takes form in a series of oppositions.

The chess game is the central image of the film. It dictates much of

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the incidental imagery such as the knight's castle or the "eight brave men" who burn the witch. The playing *(spela)* of chess matches the playing *(spela)* of the strolling troupe. Both are traditional images for the transitoriness of life: Death robs us of our roles; Death jumbles the chessmen back in the box. (The two images are juxtaposed, for example, in *Don Quixote,* II.xii.) The characters themselves and the points of view they represent are played off against one another much like pieces in a game.

There are also some particular correspondences (somewhat confused for an English audience by the Swedish names for the chessmen). The Crusader, distinguished by his cross, is the king of the chess game: when he is lost, all the rest are lost, too. It is the juggler Jof who is the knight (in Swedish, *springare,* the "leaper"). Only these two men have visions that go beyond reality, just as only the king and knight can go beyond the chess board. The juggler-knight (the "leaper") is free at all times to jump out of the two dimensions of the board—Jof's powers as a seer are almost exactly parodied by his tormentors' forcing him to jump up and down on the board table in the grotesquerie at the inn. The only other chessman who can rise off the board during the game is the king, and then only when he is castling, i.e., returning home, like this Crusader. All the pieces or characters, of course, in their own moment of death when they are taken from the board can see beyond it. Yet their visions beyond the physical reality of the board, and the Crusader's, are limited to the allegorical figure of Death; the "leaper" can see not only Death, but also the holy life of the Mother and Child.

In other words, it is the artist who has the vision the Crusader seeks in answers to abstract questions. As the church painter (whose murals prefigure the scenes of the film) says, the artist can conceive God with his senses, giving "not the reality you see, but another kind." Jof the juggler is this kind of artist: he hopes his Christ-like infant will grow up to achieve what he calls "the impossible trick," keeping the juggled ball always in the air, above the board, as it were. And Bergman himself is this kind of artist: he has called himself "a conjurer" working with a "deception of the human eye" which makes still pictures into moving pictures.

In short, in *The Seventh Seal,* as in any great work of art, theme and medium have become one. "Art lost its creative urge," Bergman writes, "the moment it was separated from worship," and, by creating in the iconographic manner of medieval art, Bergman has turned the film back to worshipping (though not God, but life). He depicts the real world objectively, with tenderness and joy, but he shows reality as signifying something beyond itself. And in doing so, Bergman has established himself as one of the world's great and original directors. He has lifted the film out of mere physical realism and made his audience of chessmen with tricked eyes see in their own moves something beyond the board.

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ELENA CROCE CRAVERI

Letter from Rome: Recent Italian Fiction

A RECENT BOOK that promised to be, at first blush, a major literary event was Carlo Emilio Gadda's eagerly awaited novel, *Quer Pasticciaccio de Via Merulana (That Dreadful Mess on the Via Merulana).* For the most, these expectations were based on the publication of the novel's first chapters in *Letteratura* fifteen years ago; and since that time, however unfairly to the author, this "work in progress" has been regarded as one of Italy's most reliable imaginative assets. But in retrospect now, these intimations of Gadda's greatness must seem premature, for the novel is inescapably disappointing.

In strategy, *Quer Pasticciaccio* is an ambitious attempt to revive the best traditions of nineteenth-century realism. The story itself is set in Rome and is narrated in *romanesco,* the dialect of Rome, in itself no negligible literary feat. But especially striking is the fact that this *tour de force* was attempted by a native of Milan and an extremely subtle interpreter of Milanese *mores* and language, who until this book had restricted himself almost entirely to the miniature scale of the short essay or imaginative sketch. And for this reason, *Quer Pasticciaccio,* Gadda's first true novel, seemed as though it might be a work of major importance. For by virtue of its very ambitiousness and scope, it appeared to promise real progress in freeing Italian fiction from the introspection of the fascist era, that whole hermetic, private literature of the imprisoned ego which is summed up in the Italian phrase, "la misura della pagina."[1] Gadda's experiment, that is, looked like a turning-point in contemporary Italian literature. And significantly, it was a turning-point that had been reached, not via some willful abstract itch for commitment (the reaction to the cult of *engagement* has been no less sharp in Italy than elsewhere), but as a direct development of twentieth-century avant-garde protest and doctrine. What, in Gadda's case, made it seem unusually fruitful was that it looked like a revolution in the language as well.

To speak of Gadda as a native of Milan (or Rome, as the case may be) does not of course mean that he is a genuine dialect-novelist. Indeed, if Gadda heads our long list of untranslatable authors, it is precisely because the dialect he employs does not, in fact, exist. His *romanesco,* for instance, is Roman by convention and courtesy only;

[1] Literally, "the limit of the page," i.e. that narrow emphasis upon the purely literary which developed as a natural reaction to Fascist supervision and censorship. Forbidden a public or political implication, writing turned inward and private, or attempted to compensate for its privacy by exaggerated emphasis upon the purely stylistic.

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yet, however artificial, Gadda's "dialect" is nonetheless handled with a firmness and skill (already visible in his youthful *Diario di Guerra*) that make him remarkable among Italian stylists. Thus, his "texture" is typically chunks of conversational or reflective "dialect," bound tightly together by a firm Italian narrative; and the dialect itself is normally justified, not as a mere device, but as the effective instrument of Gadda's pervasive wit. In general, Gadda's sense of humor—the obvious parallel with Joyce has been strangely ignored—is clearly Romantic, and Gadda himself is unmistakably the direct heir of Jean Paul, the founder of German romantic humor after Sterne, through the line of Heine's Lombard and Piedmontese followers. Both Jean Paul and Gadda, that is, observe essentially the same technique of comic inversion: as though, say, a painting of the Dutch school should be somehow done with the treacherous intent, not of praising, but of *dis*praising reality, of exposing it as though it were merely some grotesque pathetic broken toy. But inevitably, by virtue of the peculiar composition of Italian social culture, the application of this technique to an Italian subject-matter tends to circumscribe it and reduce it to the mold of a given regional dialect. Thus reality for Gadda, as for all Romantic comedians, is usually a reality of the middle-class, the *piccolo borghese*. For there is not an aspect of that middle-class world which does not reveal, beneath its "Italian" veneer, the strong features of its old regional origins and its roots in dialect.

But Gadda's dialect, as I have said, is actually a conventional dialect, not a real one, and it is this fact, I suspect, that explains the apparent miracle of the writer's breathtaking abandonment of *milanese* for *romanesco*. But as with Jean Paul, so again with Gadda: both rely upon a technique which is less that of the imagination than of mere magic. The writer's relation to his chosen reality, that is, resembles, in its compulsiveness and exhaustiveness and rigidity, an alchemical formula that can be applied to any subject-matter indiscriminately and with the same destructive results. For the analysis of reality, endlessly microscopic in its detail, finally yields only a sense of the emptiness of appearances, of sheer variety enlarged to nothingness. In short, a technique that in both Jean Paul and Gadda, in its relentless, almost monotonous competence, ends by destroying the very reality it was intended to serve. But with this crucial difference: whereas in Jean Paul the technique is justified by the sheer destructive violence of the irrationalist revolt, in Gadda, always more the disciple than the innovator, it appears as the instrument of a sensibility that today must seem either jejune or decadent.

Inevitably then, *Quer Pasticciaccio* disappoints those generous hopes it aroused. For after fifteen years the social protest which sustains the second half of the novel has lost its original vitality, while the "realism" is of a kind that seems today either false or naive. What remains is, in fact, little more than a *romanzo poliziesco* of the familiar

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nineteenth-century variety. It opens with a crime, provides us with a superb inspector, leads us relentlessly backstage among all those standard underworld sets of the *cronaca nera*.[2] Smells and colors are rendered exhaustively and splendidly, with a richness of language almost baroque in ornateness. Fifteen years ago, of course, all these familiar realistic props of the novel of protest had real social value. For fascism with its hypocrisy of "austerity" had silenced the *cronaca nera,* hoping to suppress the fact of crime with a cloak of silence. Hence even to allude to all these trappings of the 19th century novel of protest seemed somehow an individual assertion of freedom, a protest against the bourgeois hypocrisy of an era whose key values were sports, large families and the imperial *dignitas* of gestures. But today, after ten years of triumph by the *rotocalco*[3] press, the *cronaca nera* is, one would have thought, of all possible genres the least likely for implementing a novel of protest. Moreover, however sincere or ingenuous Gadda's impulse of protest may be, that protest is everywhere vitiated by a desperate immaturity, a kind of small-boy frustration revealed in an addiction to dirty words and a habit of peeking. Needless to say, no such frustration can possibly have the value of revolt, much less of liberation. And, finally, the narrative is badly mired in its own elaborateness and density. The promised novel, in short, has not been achieved, and the reader quickly finds himself shut once more within *la misura della pagina,* in the private labyrinth of the imprisoned mind.

To emphasize the failures of this fascinating *tour de force* might seem, at first sight, almost disloyal. And the disloyalty is, if anything, compounded when one attempts to take stock of the consequences of Gadda's method in the hands of his disciples. The ablest of these and also one of the most gifted younger writers in Italy is Pier Pasolini, a novelist who, although a native of the Romagna, writes verse in the dialect of Friuli, and who recently received wide public attention with an extremely able neoclassical poem, *Le Cenere di Gramsci (The Ashes of Gramsci).* But Pasolini's most important work to date is *Ragazzi di Vita (The Boys of Life),* a novel written in *romanesco,* which, in both content and style, reveals the same weaknesses as Gadda's *Pasticciaccio.* Thus, however competent, it remains essentially a slight narrative bounded by the world of adolescence (with homosexual undertones), carefully worked up and well written, but finally impressionistic and private. In this connection, however, it needs to be said that if Gadda's example has misled the younger generation, it is because the expectations which surround the *Pasticciaccio* were themselves part and parcel of a cycle of avant-garde thinking which has only very recently come to an end. And this de-

[2] The strikingly large section dedicated to crime in an Italian newspaper.

[3] That weekly press whose publications were originally patterned somewhat after *Life* but have now, for the most part, degenerated into sensational tabloids.

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mise of a whole climate of opinion seems to me as certain as it is important.

For surely the real novelty of the contemporary Italian scene is precisely the disappearance of those positions and attitudes which, in Italy at least, are thought to be typically avant-garde. To this it might be objected either that the avant-garde disappeared with the war because of the drastic change in the intellectual's position in society, or that the Italian avant-garde has always been to some extent out of the European swim. In point of fact, neither objection is really tenable, since the avant-garde is still clearly a European phenomenon (one thinks, for instance, of the so-called Angry Young Men in England), and even in Italy avant-garde attitudes and groupings persist (e.g. the hermetism of the fascist period, postwar neorealism, or those angry, devoted cults of individual writers of which Gadda's small circle is typical). By the disappearance of the avant-garde in Italy, that is, one means not that there are no individual movements or schools or intellectual fads, but that there has been a wholesale rejection of attitudes and convictions which now seem sterile or mere empty shibboleths. And among the more obvious rejections have been, first, that tendentious social esthetic which judges a work of art in terms of its "revolutionary" (or "counter-revolutionary") relevance, and, second, that familiar Messianic yearning for a new message, the *ignis fatuus* of the millennium. Not only are these doctrines unpalatable and useless in a world exhausted by metaphysical mirages, but the revulsion against them has been so sharp that visionary proposals in the name of some impossibly future society are now greeted with instant and lively dislike.

Replacing the old millennial hopes and programs, at least as they affected literature, has come a new pervasive hunger among intellectuals for writers who possess, in the phrase of Emilio Cecchi, "the talent for *realizzazione*." Vague though the notion of "realization" may be, its general intent, I think, is clear enough, especially when contrasted with the "unrealized" product characteristically achieved by the older ideologists. At least I take "realization" to mean writing whose solidity and depth is such that it seems four-dimensional, self-contained; a literature exhibiting not mere fictionalized special pleading, but contrived out of the writer's own experience, deeply, under pressure. A *realized* work, that is, would be a fully *achieved* work, limited in its significance perhaps, but autonomous, moving with the power of its own felt life and the motion proper to that life. By "autonomy," of course, is meant not that unhappy separation of the work from the world which seems at times to be the consequence of the New Criticism, but a simple refusal to allow the experience behind a work to be corrupted by an unrelated and intruded ideology.

This, in the broadest possible terms, is the esthetic which in the postwar years has absorbed the energies of several of our most talented

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writers of the generation now in its forties. If, for the most part, almost all of them were once either Communists or fellow-travelers, and the stuff of their experience is therefore narrowly political, most of them by now have become disenchanted, and that experience in turn has enriched them as writers. Others, unable to renounce their old convictions in their entirety, have remained vaguely "revolutionary" or "counter-revolutionary," content to publish the same old experience in the service of the same stale slogans. By so doing, of course, they have paid the penalty in fatigue and repetition that necessarily comes from the reworking of used-up experience. Of this last gasp of the old revolutionary avant-garde, Vasco Pratolini is probably as typical as any, and his *Metello* has recently been widely applauded by Communists and fellow-traveling critics as the finest work of realism produced by the far left to date. As a writer, of course, Pratolini notoriously combines a morbid penchant for intimacy, almost cloying in its coziness, with a habit of skeptical detachment; he is also a Tuscan, with all the infuriating arrogance and pretentiousness normally connoted by that term in modern Italian literature. And in *Metello,* supported this time by firm professional skill, these old traits appear once more. But *Metello,* though it purports to be a novel dealing with the wave of strikes which followed the first World War, is actually less a novel than a competent social history tricked out in fictional disguise. Yet by virtue of its undeniable virtuosity, even in perversion, *Metello* clearly deserves a high place among those bastard attempts to graft Soviet realism onto the 19th century realistic novel and so render it acceptable to the suspicious cultures of the West.

Alternatively we get in the work of several writers far removed from Pratolini and his gross ideological *schemata,* almost the opposite effect: the feeling of strain and self-consciousness that comes, I suspect, precisely from the author's willful determination to grind no axes, to avoid anything that looks like special pleading. And this anxiety to distinguish his work from that of his predecessors has insensibly tended to distort what he has to say and hindered his job of coming to terms with himself and his time. At least it is primarily this strain that seems to me to weaken two recent *racconti* of considerable merit, Carlo Cassola's *La Casa di Via Valadier (The House on Via Valadier)* and Mario Tobino's *La Brace dei Biassoli (The Embers of the Biassoli).* In different ways, both of these works are true "recollections," utterly unlike, however, those memoirs of adolescence that pervaded pre-war literature or those dreary records of "commitment" of the post-war period. Thus both authors, out of their common heritage of love, hate and experiences lived and suffered, recount their quest for a final human, rather than political, reality; so again, both of them, against a backdrop of native town or family, describe their initiation into life during the anti-fascist resis-

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tance and the war. And although Tobino's work is the stronger of the two, complex and rich and clear as against Cassola's comparative colorlessness and opacity, both narratives, despite their competence and intelligence, nonetheless leave the same taste of dissatisfaction.

Tobino's first work, shaped around his experiences during the African campaigns, was marked by a dryness and bitterness which his astuter critics recognized as a sign of health. His second book, however, *Le Libere Donne di Magliano (The Free Women of Magliano)* was comparatively a disappointment, a glib and somewhat self-indulgent portrayal of an insane asylum, based on his professional life as a psychiatrist. His third book, *La Brace dei Biassoli,* however, is a far more elaborate and finished work. Take, for instance, the opening description of the countryside as mirrored in the spaciousness and music of Tobino's prose:

> You come to the opposite side of the house, the side that overlooks the gleaming bend of the river Magra. I opened the window and suddenly I seemed almost to hear as well as to see the swarming of the tiny lights, the fireflies, the gradual purpling of the evening. From a deeper shadow, from the waxlike pallor of a house and the darkness of the wood, I was suddenly able to imagine the whole countryside, how it would be when the moon swung high in the sky, and under that grace of light, you would see the hillside touched to gold and the Magra sliding on below like a silver eel in the darkness.

For, despite the elegance and the lushness verging close to mannerism or preciousness, the tone is the right one, the resonance of the countryside real and deep. These, after all, *are* the feelings, stirring, exciting and yet somehow always sad, of anyone who makes his return from the city back into the Italian countryside he came from, those native provinces where the landscape—however much the *paese,* "that stony square, narrowly enclosed by walls of stone," tries to shut it out—is still so overwhelmingly there, like a presence in the air.

And the same rightness and resonance is true also of Tobino's interiors and the lives of the rural and middle-class people who move through his rooms. For the Biassoli family is nothing more or less than a symbol of Italian country life, and Tobino appropriately shows the family dying out in the old house at Vezzano where the narrator's mother, the last surviving member of *her* family, has returned to die. From native town to the modern city and then completing the cycle by returning home to die: "Viareggio, husband, children, all these were merely a long interlude, an interlude full of hard work and large with life perhaps, but now nothing more than a dream . . ."

Finally, however, despite its many and impressive skills, Tobino's new work remains more a clever conversation-piece than a novel,

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marred by a morbidity and an appetite for horror that in the denouement rises to an almost baroque gruesomeness, complete with opened coffins, undecaying corpses, etc. And although Tobino's time and place are real and, to some extent, the horror he understands and describes is the true horror of Italian provincial life, it is nonetheless presented with the solemnity and ceremoniousness that one might reserve for the production of some grisly relic, not for the reliving of one's own past experience.

This same funereal tone also pervades Cassola's *Casa di Via Valadier,* but whereas in Tobino its motive is primarily gratuitous decoration, in Cassola it serves the ends of piety and edification, arising from the work as a sad, discouraged appeal against that modern indifference which tramples underfoot everything that pious hands, with infinite love and patience, once kept alive. Thus we see first the old house on Via Valadier in Rome where Aunt Anna jealously preserves the records and private papers of her dead husband, once a leading Socialist deputy. Through this same house, reflected in the activities of a small group of old socialist comrades, we experience several phases of Fascist oppression; then, in 1945, we see the house momentarily invaded by a small bored crowd awkwardly hurrying through the posthumous commemoration of the illustrious Socialist leader who once lived there.

As a story, it is surely one of Cassola's limpest and most colorless, but its seriousness at least should command respect (one need only compare it with Pratolini's *Metello).* And if at times the narrative slips into the infantilism of the Soviet storyteller, these lapses may be attributable to Cassola's Communist experience (by now almost completely repudiated), but they are surely all the more disturbing for being automatic. Yet Cassola's goal is the creation of a real world, and if he has not yet been able to people that world with much more than sociological types (e.g. the Socialist lawyer turned Fascist, the old Socialist marblecutter from Tuscany watching with despair and resignation the gradual corruption of his family by papal Rome), the failure is surely less in his seriousness than in his craftmanship. But just as Tobino's fictional recollections have suffered from his own escapism, so Cassola's work exhibits an unhappy bleakness and a willful abstractness typical of the postwar avowals of "engagement." So too the "I" of both stories—aggressive in Tobino, colorless in Cassola, with the shabbiness of sheer obstinacy, not humility—is the obvious victim of that romantic superstition which, because it can only conceive of reality as external and material, regards all introspection as mere solipsism. And while this materialism may account for the world's clay, it says nothing of the life and warmth without which the very notion of reality is redundant. It is, regrettably, precisely this same leached sense of reality that appears, starkly and squalidly, in Cassola's latest *racconto, Il Matrimonio del Dopoguerra (The Postwar Marriage).*

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If Tobino and Cassola show to what extremes the genre of fictionalized autobiography has gone, Giorgio Bassani's *Cinque Storie Ferrarese (Five Tales of Ferrara)* is perhaps somewhat more representative. Here, against a background of provincial Ferrara, side by side with the growth of Fascism and the Resistance, is traced the dissolution of the ancient Jewish community of Ferrara. But while Bassani's stories are all composed, with a good eye and devotedly, within the limits of the Flaubertian ideal, and those limits maintained with exceptional rigor, it still seems to me that they suffer from an obsession with the past which the author cannot somehow relate to the present. Behind the classical facade, that is, there is a tone, an attitude to time, which falls somewhere in that no man's land between nostalgia and morbidity. Worse, Bassani's unmistakable gifts for comedy and irony appear to have been almost systematically suffocated by the arbitrariness of his chosen form and his obsession with the past.

If one turns from these fictional autobiographies to the work of a more frivolous group of writers, the sense of dissatisfaction promptly vanishes. Extremely diverse in both origins and abilities, these writers are distinguished by their common adoption of a semi-serious and semi-disguised *persona*. And although this device derives its power more from the illusion of charm than from any intrinsic dramatic strength, it undoubtedly enhances the attraction and wit of their work. Characteristic of the group perhaps is the work of an otherwise minor novelist, Antonio Delfini. And in his *Ricordo della Basca (Basque Memories)* we have the story of a typical *vitellone*[4] of a provincial city (Delfini's Modena is transparently Stendhalian), lost in a wild crisscross of love affairs which eventually peter out into mere laziness and masochistic renunciation of the world. Everywhere, moreover, the theme of romantic dandyism is handled with remarkable authenticity. Yet if the action of this book is well-motivated and the narrative fired at moments by a firm anti-fascist sensibility, it has to be said that Delfini's latest collection of *racconti, La Rosina Perduta (The Little Lost Rose),* contains only one good story, and that a tale of icy libertinism and sentimental abjection which comes perilously close to being merely a pre-Romantic exercise. In Niccolo Tucci, another writer of the group, we have a writer whose *persona,* like Delfini's, is typically involved in the narrative but at the same time manages to keep an ironic distance from it. But where Delfini's *persona* is endowed with a natural provincial charm, Tucci possesses a rare and attractive cosmopolitanism and spontaneity, as though his humor were a mishmash of Russian wit and Florentine quickness polished to a high gloss by the slick pages of *The New Yorker.*

But surely the most camouflaged *persona* in contemporary Italian fiction is that of Mario Soldati. whose complete *Racconti Giovanili*

[4] Literally, "yearling beef"; but commonly used to designate the Italian teen-age boy, usually opprobriously.

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(Earlier Stories) was recently released hard on the heels of *Il Vero Silvestri (The True Silvestri)*. While it may be true that Soldati's ambitions in the movies[5] have forced him to spread his talents somewhat thin, he remains nonetheless primarily a writer who, by virtue of his tastes, his intelligent dilettantism and perhaps even of his times, reminds one inevitably of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Catholic but also skeptical, sentimental but astute, frivolous with the incorrigibility of a sophomore, perpetually disguised by a beard or stiff collars or gotten up in the stereotype of a wealthy businessman, Soldati is a double personality on a grand scale, half clown and half psychopath. And so his stories, necessarily, resolve themselves again and again into that quest for a lost or elusive identity that preoccupies so much of contemporary literature. Thus in *Il Vero Silvestri,* the protagonist is forced to witness the complete annihilation of his image of the man who was once his best friend, and so the friend dies for him a second time only to be rediscovered on a more human level in the end. For, as the narrator recognizes, the friend who descends to blackmail in the agony of his passion is more real and therefore more capable of being pitied and loved than the original Silvestri, that mildly amiable, mildly artistic country gentleman who squanders his life in genteel inactivity. Moreover, despite the apparent conventionality of the plot, the story has, for Soldati, unusual depth and scope. Thus, for instance, that image of the woman who with calm objectivity assesses her spent and ruined beauty as though it were a piece of badly invested capital is realized by Soldati with a new kindness and the maturer art which that new kindness signifies.

Moravia's latest novel, *La Ciociara* (translated into English under the title of *The Two Women*) contains, like almost all of his work, elements that look at first like fresh invention or even experiment. But unless I am mistaken, this experimentalism is merely apparent and is really nothing more than one more variation on a personality that has never been at a loss for pronounced individual traits. But with time these traits have become even more pronounced without being in any way modified or altered. And we are entitled, I think, to ask just how far Moravia, the most lucid of realists, satisfies that goal of "realization" demanded by Cecchi. Or whether, on the other hand, Moravia's lucidity is not in fact the product of a prodigious adolescent vision, utterly innocent of that complexity of adult responsibility and choice which "realization" necessarily requires. For the present it seems to me sufficient merely to raise the question, for its repercussions are large and lie far beyond the scope of the present chronicle. Yet I think the question must eventually be answered if we are to come to terms with Moravia and make an adequate judgment of his artistic achievement.

[5] As a young man, Soldati renounced a promising career as an art-critic to become a movie-director. Though he has produced several competent films, his usual product is both mediocre and commercial, spoiled by a fussy preoccupation with detail.

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The crucial difficulty, of course, in describing contemporary Italian fiction is that one is overwhelmed by the sheer abundance of the material and at the same time puzzled by its very indeterminateness. Of interesting work there has been no lack, and one can point to several writers of exceptional talent (Elsa Morante, say, or Natalia Ginzburg), yet almost without exception these writers represent nothing really original or their work lacks that all-important grounding in definite purposes and real choices. But I suspect that the wide discussion aroused by Ignazio Silone's *Il Segreto di Luca (The Secret of Luca),* is the consequence of a real shift in interest toward that kind of work I have called "realized." At least in this book author and reader seem to meet each other for the first time in a very different way. Thus Silone's religious and social purpose is no longer primary, nor is the meaning of the book here expressed by one of those strangely symbolic characters who have hitherto always made Silone's work seem somehow directly alien to Italian sensibilities. Instead, the meaning is now expressed simply through an extremely tight dramatic interweaving of two related threads, the attempt to prove a man's innocence and an impossible love affair. The quest for proof begins with a childhood memory, a boy's recollection of the letters he had taken down for an illiterate mother to her son (Luca) in prison, and moves inexorably on to the discovery of the novel's "secret": that the right of Luca and Hortensia to love each other could be asserted only by a sacrifice which sent him to prison and her to a convent. The society which exacts this sacrifice of the lovers is the tyrannical ingrown world of a few dirty houses in a remote village of the Italian South. Tight, knotty, complex, the plot never slows in its fine dramatic sweep, and if at the close the reader finds himself at first uncertain, even a little bewildered, the very depth of one's involvement is a rare thing in recent Italian fiction. Needless to say, there is symbolism at work here also, but employed so subtly and effectively that the reader makes his interpretations almost without being aware of having made them. He *knows,* that is, that the ties which really bind Luca and Hortensia are not merely those of some archaic and feudal world, but the same ones that still, with undiminished sway, govern his own time and his own society: gratitude, formal dependence, conventional honor.

Another recent and striking success, very different from Silone's *Segreto,* is Italo Calvino's *Il Barone Rampante (The Climbing Baron).* A genuinely unusual work, its publication so shortly after the appearance of a very large collection of Italian folktales (edited and translated out of dialect by Calvino) merely confirms, I think, the fact that Calvino's work, despite its apparent slightness and waywardness, has an overall consistency and solidity which is rare indeed among the younger generation. One can, it is true, point out that *The Climbing Baron* and its predecessor in the series, *Il Visconte Dimez-*

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zato (The Halved Viscount), are troubled by a disconcerting ambiguity that makes Calvino at one moment a genuine storyteller in the tradition of Cervantes and at the next a compulsive fantasist of a surrealistic stripe. But the distinction can be pressed too hard, I think, for if Calvino's nature is visibly a double one, the very compounding of perspectives is also a source of power. And what surely deserves emphasis is the remarkable development of the writerlike skills in Calvino's latest work, the fine blossoming of his cadenced, lovely prose (visible throughout the whole first section, the love-story and the finale) and the marked growth in the writer's personal maturity (e.g. the snail episode, the incident of the fruit-thieves and the musical variations on the theme of the forest). But most impressive, I think, is the way in which Calvino, utterly uncontaminated by fashionable jargon or the private cant of avant-garde cliques, addresses himself, without special pleading or private asides, directly to his reader's experience.

Indeed, far from being sophisticated or "intellectual," Calvino's sensibility is essentially almost childlike; thus, for instance, the Puckish passion for games is not only obsessive, but even at times annoying, as though the writer were a small boy so absorbed in his games that he couldn't be bothered to come down to dinner. Yet the sensibility is a genuine one, adventurous in taking risks and anything but escapist. And if Calvino's imagination has visibly been fostered on bookish experience and voracious private reading, this is to say nothing more than that it is "literary" in a time-honored sense, not at all "intellectual." As such, however, it reveals hardly a trace of that quest for new experience and imaginative substitutes which has driven writers to ransack everything from sociology to science for over a hundred years now. The experience, that is, is genuine, and despite the unlikeliness and high color of Calvino's material, his taste is quite free of mere eclecticism. At least in his latest novel the comic vein seems to me a thoroughly traditional one, and hence quite in keeping with his own moral purpose as well as with his transparently eighteenth-century sympathies. This preference for the eighteenth century, it needs to be pointed out, not only gives Calvino an ideal historical canvas to work with, but the convergence between literary sensibility and philosophical bent—that same nostalgia for the Rationalist Enlightenment that Calvino shares with the two Communist heretics, Antonio Giolitti and Furio Diaz—is, for a writer, not only unusual but extremely happy.

But viewed in this way, Calvino's tale of the treed Piedmontese baron falls perfectly into the familiar framework of the traditional *Erziehungsroman.* Thus the baron, accepting the challenge thrown down to him by the beautiful but capricious Viola, to whom he is bound for life, carries out his choice to the end, literally living his life in the trees without ever touching ground, and yet never cutting

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himself off from the experience proper to his own time and condition. He remains, that is, faithful to his family duty as eldest son and to his rural community, at the same time that he shows himself a good eighteenth-century man, a leader of the Enlightenment, a Mason, experimenter with new scientific techniques, etc. The story is dense, the pace well sustained except perhaps for a certain slackening off in the next to last section; but if one senses disproportion here, the fault is surely less stagnation of invention than a kind of internal uncertainty in Calvino's emphasis. At least the protagonist, if I understand Calvino correctly, had fully won his own battle on the day he accepted his father's inheritance; on that day he knows that he has at last won through to an objective view of the world, committed at the same time that it is disinterested. Why then, one wonders, at the very close of his life is he shown to us plunged in the passive melancholy of a man who hears, far off, the echoes of the Revolution? The reservations of historians and the enemies of the Enlightenment will be, of course, only too obvious; yet on the other hand, the very variety of developments possible to this approach to experience is what gives the novel much of its real value and promise.

If confirmation were needed, it could be found, I think, in Calvino's most recent work, *La Speculazione Edilizia (The Building Speculation)*. Here again everything remains finally unresolved and the irresolution is, again, quite intentional. The story itself is a realistic first-person narrative of the disastrous adventures of an ex-communist who, thanks to irremediable flaws in his own nature, is once again only too thoroughly "engaged"; that is, he is now deeply involved in proving to himself his "restored confidence in his bourgeois nature," a feat which he performs by means of a rather shady piece of speculation. As a counterweight against the moral impasse and perplexity of the narrator's situation, Calvino employs a vein of offsetting comedy—not to be confused with humor—subtle but also frank and authentic. And this comedy in turn provides the story with its "realization" and its resolution, in this case that classic resolution according to which we purge away our weaknesses and errors in the humanity of knowing how to laugh, not bitterly, but cordially, with sympathy, at ourselves.

It would perhaps be unjust to overload with praise a young writer who surely deserves a better fate than being made to serve some narrow representative function. But among our younger generation, Calvino is, I think, the first who has managed to traditionalize his own contemporary experience without resorting to some ready-made "social" or "intellectual" stance. His mind, that is, is unmistakably independent, and because this independence is combined with obvious talent and true imagination, Calvino seems to me the one younger writer who promises something like a genuine renewal in Italian fiction.

[*Translated by William and Jean Arrowsmith*]

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Reviews

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Translation and Communication

OURS IS AN AGE of translations, adaptations, and reproductions, in music, art, and literature; it is an era the first principles of which are eclecticism, cross-fertilization, and bastardization. "Synthetic" is not only an honorable word, it is characteristically modern. Yet by the same token, ours is a culture terribly concerned with the genuine. We insist upon the genuine; we pursue it avidly; we scrape prudish 19th-century draperies off our El Grecos, perform Bach on the viol da gamba unaccompanied, and collate First Folios to find out what Shakespeare Really Wrote. Our apparatus for squeezing the last ounce of genuineness out of the genuine is as formidable as our apparatus for multiplying the inescapably fake.

Nothing, of course, is easier than to sneer at either horn of this cultural dilemma; nothing harder than to retain a balanced (if necessarily uneasy) view of them both. All translations are faulty, all reproductions inaccurate if not worse; yet they serve a variety of legitimate purposes, including the fostering of that cosmopolitanism which entitles us to despise them. And without a meticulous concern for accuracy, neither criticism nor scholarship can expect to get very far. Perhaps the most useful reflection to emerge from reading a potpourri of opinions on translation, like that sponsored by Mr. Reuben Brower,[1] is that a translation, like an edition or an essay or any piece of literary work whatever, is a social act, limited in its objectives and capabilities. We don't always remember this when we think of the great translations; and it is true that one mark of a fine translation (as of a fine piece of writing of any sort) is to communicate to a great many people on a great many levels. But even the greatest have their limits, of which we become aware as they grow obsolete; or, still more impressively, as they accumulate and we are able to compare and contrast them. Take simply a little everyday crux like the degree of intimacy implied in the use among Latin peoples of the second personal singular. The English equivalents, "thee" and "thou", imply more, not less, formality than the commonplace "you"; besides, they are irrelevantly archaic. But "you" is not a departure from more formalized modes of speech; it implies no special aura of tenderness and intimacy. So what shall the poor translator do? He can get one quality one way and another the other; to get both at once without gratuitous additions is impossible. And similarly

[1] ON TRANSLATION, edited by *Reuben Brower*. Harvard University Press. $6.50

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with other particular qualities. We can get Homer's speed and flow from Mr. Rieu, but for the hard, angular particularity of the Greek eye, and the massive, nervous strength of the hexameter, we must read Richmond Lattimore. (And the qualities which make his translation great on the one hand, make it slow on another, at least for the relatively untutored reader.)

It is the old paradox—whether to translate Horace's togas or his contemporaneity, and in what proportions? Not even the original has both for every reader; and what the original had for its own day, nobody really knows. Even if we really knew, there would be no reason to think a translator obliged to render just this relationship. From such crushing premises, nothing is easier than to deduce that translation is quite impossible. In the sense of a 100% carryover, it doubtless is; the most successful of Mr. Brower's contributors are those who start with this conclusion and go on from there.

The volume under review—to revert to it, for a moment—is in fact a peculiarly mixed production. Everyone can recognize that translation is a proper topic for serious consideration; but, faced with the problem of actually considering it, the contributors pop off in all sorts of odd directions. Memoirs, reminiscences, and after-dinner speeches mingle with weighty philosophical considerations. Old bones, like the *traduttore-traditore* wheeze, are accepted and deplored and mumbled-over, to the detriment of everyone's digestion; and the traffic-patterns are thick with hobby-horses being galloped eagerly off to the earth's four corners.

A book like this is so amorphous that it cannot really be judged as a unit, and so various that it can hardly be discussed in its fragments. Vladimir Nabokov, whose principles would be the ruin of all translation were they not so brilliantly subverted by his literary sensitivity, contributes a squib on the need to find Pushkin's Shakespeare where he found it—in French translations. True enough; but what then? Justin O'Brien reminisces about his experiences in translating Gide and others; it is entertaining shop-talk. Rolfe Humphries and Dudley Fitts are represented characteristically, with some fresh, frank, humorous, self-conscious modernity on the topic of translating the classics. Achilles Fang seems to be enjoying a few perfectly private jokes concerning translations from the Chinese (Sinologists with a rich sense of humor and an idle $6.50, please note). Eugene Nida, drawing on the vast experience accumulated by Bible-translators, shows how intimately linguistic matters are linked up with social customs. (Among the Chokwe of Central Africa, one is entertained to learn, a literal translation of "beat one's breast" would have the import of "pat oneself on the back"; to get a real equivalent for "beat one's breast", one must say, literally, "club one's head.") John Hollander is acute, incisive, and (it seems to me) extraordinarily pertinent in his discussion of "Versions, Interpretations, and Peformances"; distinguish-

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ing the levels at which translation aims to be viable, he is abstract and agile without ever vaporizing beyond the ken of the working translator.

Of all the pieces in the volume, Professor Quine's discourse on meaning seems itself most in need of translation; I am not quite sure what dialect it should be written in (perhaps Bishop Wilkins' Real Character), but English is hard put to survive the—shall we say?—experience. Tucked far off in the darkest corner of the volume is a cheerful, terrifying little discussion of translation as a mechanical process, which reminds us that the day is not far off when we shall eat only cubes of compressed plankton, conduct our interpersonal relationships with the assistance of IBM, and talk Volapük or electronic code.

Amid all the blighting scepticisms and devastating reflections to which these essays give rise, it is nice to see that one test remains standard; if memory serves, it used to be much in favor with those who administered Baker and Inglis' elementary Latin text nearly thirty years ago. The test is simply to translate a passage of Latin into English, and then, independently, translate the English back into Latin. A couple of years' earnest practice on this circularity generally produced a schoolboy who knew something of the English and Latin tongues. There is a current story of a machine which was asked to take this test by translating an English proverb into Japanese and the resultant Japanese back into English. It came up with an economical but cryptic phrase, "invisible idiot," as a rendering of the original proverb, which, as I understand it, read "Out of sight, out of mind."

Overwhelmed by snobbery and expertise ("What, you haven't read the Logomancers in their original Estonian!") and buried beneath the polyphyletic waves of mass-education, we are doomed to watch our linguistic standards steadily deteriorate. It seems that Latin will no longer be required of students in British universities, as the requirement of readable English has become a dead letter among American ones. The age of universal Babu is fast descending on us; it is not so strange as true that the Great-Books courses must bear a share of the responsibility for it. Modern educators are so intent on conveying world-cultures—via translation, necessarily—that knowledge of English itself has languished and grown thin. The modern college student reads Milton and Shakespeare, essentially, as if in translation; the joke is slowly evaporating from that recent comical title, "Translations from the English." When our natural dialect has become that of a presidential press-conference, even Mother Goose will have to be translated into gobbledygook. In a sense, then, the problem of translation is universal, as well as insoluble; not even our native tongue offers a refuge from it. On the other hand, we can easily make the whole matter sound unduly portentous by asking more

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of words than words can be asked to convey. ("What do you mean by 'Tuesday'?"—it is not a request for information, it is an act of social aggression.) Mr. Brower's hydra-headed collection may help at least to remind us how much effort goes into keeping open even the most inadequate channels of communication. "Men do not communicate in order to effect agreement; they must agree in order to communicate"—the presence or absence of a language-barrier hardly affects the truth of this sad and cynical maxim. Or of that other, even colder, one: "Speech was given to man to enable him to conceal his thoughts."

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Fiction Chronicle

SHALL I BEGIN THIS CHRONICLE by confessing that it is my first—by admitting that I have never before reviewed contemporary fiction, or indeed (with negligible exceptions) contemporary literature of any kind? For such is the shameful fact. And I agree that it *is* shameful. I entirely agree that it must be the critic's ultimate justification that he should keep a live eye on living writing. If he does not, he deserves the gibe of Sartre—deserves to be called a *gardien de cimetière,* a keeper of the graveyard. That need not, I suppose, imply that he must *write* about the living (he may not get the chance to). But he has to read them, he has to think about them, his mind must be alive to them. If it isn't, he may rest assured that what he writes of the dead will be dead also.

So I am glad of this chance of joining the ranks of the reviewers of novels; but my gladness, I have to admit, is faintly dashed by the thought of the raggle-taggle army I am joining. I think of the regulars, of the week-in week-out practitioners in my native England (I can't speak of them in this land), and I cannot help thinking that the plaint Henry James made some forty years ago—that criticism, in face of the modern novel, had simply abnegated its function—is as justified now as it was when he made it. It is not that their standards are low or perverse or wrong; it is simply that, qua reviewers, they seem to have no standards at all. I am willing to believe that that cannot be helped, that it is simply a function of sheer quantity, that I too, if I did it week-in week-out, would lose such standards as I may possess. But then, if that is the case, if reviewing of this kind must confess its complete separation from criticism, even the simplest, the question must follow: What *is* the good of it? Why have it at all? May it not—by pre-

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tending to be something (criticism) which it isn't—be doing not only no good, but positive harm? And the question is succeeded by a wonderful thought: Wouldn't it be lovely if—just for a space, for three years, let us say—there were NO REVIEWS AT ALL? If readers had to do what, after all, they did do until comparatively lately in the history of literature—find their own ways to the books they liked? If the goodness of the good books and the badness of the bad ones were established by the private and verbal discussions of reader with reader? What would happen in that blessed interregnum? Many famous names, one imagines, would go on for a time by a momentum which years of praise had given them—and then, how many of them would stop? Then it would not be lèse majesté to admit that though Mr. X wrote one or two good novels twenty years ago, he is writing nothing but bad ones now, for all his world-fame and Nobel laurels. Then those novels which are written only to be made into movies would be only made into movies. Then some obscure names and small-sellers would come to the front and climb to the top, and the much-puffed for dubious reasons would find their way to the bottom. Then—

But this is a pipe-dream. The reviewer of the novel is always with us, as surely as the stuff he feeds on. And I, of course, justify—as we all do in some sphere of action—my engaging in what I have just declared to be a deplorable activity by the miserable plea that if *I* don't do it, someone else *will*. So here I am, confronted by a formidable pile of fiction which the Editors have kindly sent me and having to decide, in the first place, which of them—for of some of them one can really say nothing—may be written about at all. They are a most international assortment that lie before me. Fiction American and English, fiction Irish and French and Italian, fiction German and Japanese. They remind me in their heterogeneousness of those courses in World Literature which are apt to stupefy the Old World academic when he first encounters the higher education of America: courses which lead to such engaging confessions as one that was made me by an ingenuous freshman. "What have you been reading lately?" I asked him. "Lately," he answered, "I've been reading the *Divine Comedy* and Thorne Smith." Yes, I came to these courses with the expected quota of Old World snootiness, for the Old World academic cherishes the conviction that if you can't learn a great deal about a subject, you'd better not learn anything about it—and the latter part of the conviction, at any rate, he often fulfils to the letter. But experience has modified my snootiness. This headlong frontal paperbound assault on the literatures of the world, this splendid indifference to the obstacles linguistic and historical, has something heroic, Elizabethan, about it: certainly a refreshing change from the dry ironic caution of the Old World mind. Moreover, it does have a kind of critical principle behind it—and now I am coming to my muttons—the principle that a work of art, of fiction in this case, can be both felt and judged with

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little or no knowledge of the language, the society, the tradition, the background, which made it. It assumes that every example of the Idea of the thing called Fiction can be successfully evaluated by every example of the person called Critic, however remote the environment of each particular example of the former may be from the latter's acquaintance. Like all assumptions, it is an act of faith; like all acts of faith, only the results can justify it. And here are *my* results.

We begin with three novels[1] which are, it appears, offerings from the French avant-garde of fiction. My verdict on that sector of the literary world must be one of acute depression, if these form a fair sample. What they have in common is a sterile pre-occupation with technical novelty and a clever-naive reliance on dubious theories: both of which, I suppose it would be fair to say, have long been the weaknesses of French avant-gardes. Robbe-Grillet, we are told, "is important because he has attacked the last bastion of the traditional art of writing; the organization of literary space." (A sad outlook, if true, for future avant-gardes: what do they do when the *last* bastion has fallen?) This he does by a minute rendering of objects and actions, in a style reminiscent of the "writing-up" of a scientific experiment—like this:

> Then the man slowly approaches, stands behind her, stares at her for a moment, stretches out his hand and slowly caresses the nape of her neck with his fingertips. The huge hand, the blond head, the oil lamp, the edge of the first plate (on the right), and the left upright of the window are all aligned in the same oblique plane.
>
> The lamp is made of brass and clear glass. From its square base rises a cylindrical, fluted stem supporting the oil reservoir—a half-globe with its convexity underneath. This reservoir is half-full of a brownish liquid which does not resemble commercial oil. On its upper part is a flange of stamped metal an inch and a half high, into which is screwed the glass—a perpendicular tube widening slightly at the base. It is this perforated flange, brightly lighted from within, which can be seen most clearly of all the articles in the room. It consists of two superimposed series of equal tangent circles—rings, more exactly, since their centers are hollow—each ring of the upper series being exactly above a ring of the lower row to which it is joined for a fraction of an inch.

The reader will naturally ask: What is the purpose of this minuteness? Does one get a clearer "picture" of the lamp than one would by a description less microscopic? If one does, what is gained by it? Would

[1] THE VOYEUR, by *Alain Robbe-Grillet*. Grove. $1.75. A CHANGE OF HEART, by *Michel Butor*. Simon and Schuster. $3.75. THE WIND, by *Claude Simon*. Braziller. $3.50.

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a real man, caressing the neck of a girl, really study the lamp in front of her with such intensity of care that that description would correspond to what he is consciously seeing? If he would not, why should we, the readers, the imagined spectators of the scene, be invited to do so? Why should our attention be directed to the object far more carefully than to the people? Because (says the blurb) Robbe-Grillet believes that "the surface of things is more meaningful than the depth of human beings." That is the theory—the silly-clever theory, as I see it—which lies behind this ingenious nonsense. But perhaps it is worse than ingenious: for to find "the depth of human beings" less "meaningful" than "the surface of things"—if it is anything more than a gimmick thought up in a Paris café—can only be the outcome of despair.

Michel Butor appears to follow the same line with less fanaticism. The content of his novel is extremely slender—a man goes by train from France to Italy with the intention of abandoning his wife in Paris for his mistress in Rome, but changes his mind en route—and this small content is inflated to 250 pages by an intricate mixture of flashbacks and minute descriptions of the compartment he travels in, the people he travels with, and the little things he does and they do on the way. It is written throughout (I cannot see why) in the second person; the hero addresses himself throughout as "you":

> You crush out your cigarette butt in the ash tray. A hand taps against the window with some metal object, the hand of the ticket collector with his punch, and you hunt inside your jacket for your wallet, not the black one the children gave you for your birthday on Wednesday, which you left in its box on a shelf in the wardrobe, but the old red one containing your passport (which will have expired in a month . . .

Again, there is an almost mystical conviction of the importance of material details; again, there seems a total lack of justification for these details, since they illuminate neither the character of the hero (anyone, after all, might have in his wallet "your rather grubby identity card with your unrecognizable old photograph") nor his moral dilemma. And if it is argued that they do at least reproduce, in a *trompe-l'oeil* style, the actual moment of his experience, what, in itself, is the point of that? Experience in itself is simply experience: it is nothing in art unless it is given value.

With Claude Simon I feel—as I do not feel with the others—that there is here a real imaginative talent. But the talent, for me, is at present almost completely wasted by a maddening style and an even more maddening manner of narration. No passage of quotable length can possibly convey the former; I can only say that for M. Simon a sentence of two-page length containing several parentheses, each of a dozen lines or so and some of them occurring between subject and

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verb, is a normal method of progression. And as for the narration, the events of the story—I think there is one—are concealed under such a thick proliferation of comment and philosophizing that I for one remain totally uncertain of what has happened to whom. Perhaps that was intended. Certainly the book gives an authentic effect of hallucination; and that is where I see the evidence of a talent. Individual episodes leap out of the fog with real power; the man who wrote this page and that page, I say to myself, is a real writer. But he hasn't, for my money, written a real book.

Next we come to four sizeable novels[2]—two English, two American—in which "the traditional art of writing" (if there is such a thing) is not so radically attacked. One of them, Joyce Cary's last work, must, I think, be respectfully dismissed as rather the adumbration of a novel than a novel completed. He wrote it against time during his last illness; he would never have published it as it stands. But in spite of the loose ends, the sketchiness, the themes too exposed and abrupt as if in a synopsis, the Cary qualities are evident, both the virtues and the defects. There are the crowded bustle of people and actions, the signs of a sensitive and lively mind fascinated by living, the interest in major themes (in this book, the theme is religion—the genuine and the fake, the orthodox and the eccentric); there are also the tendency to lose control of the crowd and bustle and the ultimate marionette-like *un*reality of these characters whose reality is being so strenuously enforced. For me, Cary's people exist, with tremendous vigour, *on* the page; but they rarely leave it. They rarely attain that illusion of independence, of taking command, which is the hallmark of the novelist's complete achievement. This failure went together with the crowdedness; in his earlier books (*Mister Johnson,* for instance, which to my mind is his best) the proliferation was more controlled and the creation more successful. He was a good novelist, individual and intelligent; he was not a great one.

The same may be said, at present, of Angus Wilson. In *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* he is clearly trying for something radically different from his previous novels. The world he depicts is no longer the raddled Bohemia of *Anglo-saxon Attitudes* and *Hemlock and After*; the smartness is toned down; the brittle cleverness is not so strained. The whole tone is more subdued. The central theme imposes a degree of sobriety; it tells how a middle-aged woman, well-bred and smart, who is suddenly widowed, copes with her problem—which is not only her bereavement but also her character, for the shock of poverty and loneliness brings out, first to others and then to herself, that

[2] THE CAPTIVE AND THE FREE, by *Joyce Cary*. Harper. $5.00. THE MIDDLE AGE OF MRS. ELIOT, by *Angus Wilson*. Viking. $4.95. HENDERSON THE RAIN KING, by *Saul Bellow*. Viking. $4.50. THE OPTIMIST, by *Herbert Gold*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.

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under a surface of charm and intelligence were a basic selfishness and a basic crassness. Meg Eliot is a very interesting *literary* creation—and I stress the epithet for two reasons. There are hints that the author would like us to see her as the latest in the long roll of English heroines of fiction. "I am a natural Emma," she says herself (meaning Jane Austen's Emma)—and then she decides that she used to be Maggie Tulliver. Even her name (George Eliot? Anne Elliot?) may be meant to arouse vague echoes. If this is so, it may give the reason why, for myself, the creation does not quite come off. It seems too careful, too conscientious—literary again, but now in another sense. She is the central figure of the book; much more space, and perhaps more care, have gone to her making, than to all the others—and yet she is not as living as they are. The people who really come alive are still—as they have always been in Wilson's writings—the eccentrics and the oddities. These are observed, as always, with remarkable acuteness—and in this book, with greater sympathy than before. And another gift that Wilson has always had is apparent here also—he looks at the social scene of contemporary England, at the shiftings of class and wealth, with an accurate and unbiassed eye. His works will be very useful to the social historian of a century hence. In the climate of contemporary criticism of fiction, that, I suppose, will sound like faint praise; for those who think of "the novel as poem" are apt to sniff at such by-products of interest. They are wrong, if they do. The novel has always skirted the borders of social history; its claims to be pure "art" or pure "vision" have always been dubious, and the actual specimens through which the claim is made are apt to be unreadable. The world is not so full of acute observers of society that we can afford to disdain them when they come to us in the form of novelists.

With Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* we are a good deal farther from "reality." Henderson himself, the narrator and the center, is, as I take it, an attempt at creating a *giant*—a mythic figure, something of the order of Rabelais' Gargantua. All the details that build him up are larger than life. His face is "half the length of another person's body"; his mouth is an "enormous moat"; he has "the bulk of a football player and the color of a gipsy"; his neck size is 22; he "held up a mined bridge in Italy and kept it from collapsing." He behaves appropriately—rages enormously; weeps bucketfulls; is "moody, rough, tyrannical and probably mad"; suffers from a "disturbance" in his heart, from "a voice that spoke there and said, *I want, I want, I want!*" There is a vast unexplainable sorrow in the middle of him; his teeth are rotten and the dentistry which repairs them is always collapsing. Thus equipped, Henderson the giant departs from his native America and investigates Africa. There he has a variety of adventures, all of them with unfortunate endings; and from there, in the end, he returns—with a lion cub.

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I suppose it is allegory of a kind. Henderson is perhaps America as Americans are apt to see her—and maybe they're right—suddenly become enormously powerful and reluctantly dominant, charging round the world from continent to continent, filled to the brim with good intentions and technical know-how and a mighty yearning to be loved—but not always, to her puzzlement and sadness, producing either the beneficial results, or the love, that she aims at. When Henderson undertakes to deliver an African tribe from the plague of frogs infesting their water-tank, he does so with complete success; he blows the frogs to pieces with a homemade bomb constructed with vast ingenuity—and he blows to pieces also the wall of the tank, and all the water goes out with the frogs. If this is the book's intention, then its central message is in something that Henderson says towards the end. "Millions of Americans have gone forth since the war to redeem the present and discover the future . . . It's the destiny of my generation of Americans to go out in the world and try to find the wisdom of life." This message is put across with great vigour and humour—the book is full of episodes both funny and touching—and my only doubts are concerned with the basic concept of the whole thing. I wonder if this presentation of America as the blundering well-intentioned giant is not fundamentally a *self-flattering* presentation, if there isn't a subtle sentimentalising at the root of it. And I wonder also if it is really possible, in this time and place, to create a figure of mythical largeness. For all his vigour, there is something *constructed* in Henderson. But the construction is one of genuine originality.

There is another American "prototype" (the blurb's word) in Herbert Gold's *The Optimist*. This is the man of ambition, who pushes himself up from success to success but is all the time basically unsure of why he is doing it—cannot decide if he is really pushing or being pushed—loses more and more of his private identity as he gains more and more of a public identity. "Burr was violent, socialized and immoral, the new ambition which wants to be President, wants to be rich, wants to be powerful and good. Floating, open to anything that can define him, he risks being defined by accidents." The question he asks himself is: "Where did it go wrong?" The only answer he can give is: "More! more! more!" The difficulty a novelist faces with a character who "risks being defined by accidents" is that such a character has no real center; he is simply a series of public events. But if, to remedy that, the novelist puts most of the emphasis on the private failures and doubts and introspections, then the public career, the ambition, of his hero is liable to be shadowy and unconvincing. This is the trouble with *The Optimist*. Burr Fuller's private troubles, amorous and matrimonial, are very thoroughly explored and reasonably convincing—though I must confess to a feeling that I've been there before. But his entry into politics, and what he

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does in that world, seem curiously perfunctory; I find it hard to believe that he was really accepted as a candidate for Congress, harder still to believe he had a chance of making it. The real success of the book is his wife Laura. That is a brilliant portrait—of a woman who cannot "give and take," who can only "fight," whose refusing and yielding alike are moves in a war of nerves, and whose nerves, in the end, betray her to a frenzy of diets and doctors and sleeping-pills. She too, I suppose, is a "prototype"—but she is also a fully realized individual, which the hero is not.

Finally, I come to the four works[3] to whose authors—if this were a prize-giving ceremony—I would award my prizes. With a look of conscious rectitude for the international impartiality of my choice, I would say to Mr. Benjamin DeMott of America, Mr. Yasunari Kawabata of Japan, Herr Friedrich Duerrenmatt of Switzerland, and Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson of England: "The prizes go to you because, of all the offerings in this competition, yours seemed to me the ones which knew what they wanted to do, which drew out their limits and filled their limits precisely and stayed within them with no loose ends hanging out. *Elle remplit son cadre à merveille,* said Gide of Jane Austen; and that, in your various ways, is what you have done—filled your frames but not overflowed them."

Duerrenmatt's *The Pledge* is a remarkably tight and well-organized high-level thriller. A little girl is raped and murdered in a Swiss village. A wandering peddler, with a bad reputation, is arrested and grilled; he confesses to the crime; he hangs himself in his cell. Everyone is happy. Justice has been done, the danger removed; the village parents can sleep in peace. Everyone is happy—except the police inspector who supervised the case. His conviction that the peddler was innocent grows into an obsession; he throws up his job and devotes the rest of his life to finding out who really did it. He does so—at the cost of his own collapse as a human being. The whole thing is told with great economy and directness; the implications that lie behind it (what is justice? is it much more than the finding of a scapegoat?) are never obtruded. You can read it in an hour or two, and your time will not be wasted.

Miss Hansford Johnson's *The Unspeakable Skipton* is an exercise in the picaresque. Its hero, though English, lives by choice among the Gothic beauties of Bruges in Belgium. He lives in a hand-to-mouth fashion partly by writing (he believes himself to be a great writer, a supreme, though unhappily neglected, artist in words); partly by sponging on relatives and publishers; largely by dubious forms of

[3] THE PLEDGE, by *Friedrich Duerrenmatt*. Knopf. $3.00. THE UNSPEAKABLE SKIPTON, by *Pamela Hansford Johnson*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.95. THOUSAND CRANES, by *Yasunari Kawabata*. Knopf. $3.00. THE BODY'S CAGE, by *Benjamin DeMott*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.00.

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assistance to tourists, whom he escorts to places of ill-fame and peculiar amusement. He is a very pious Catholic; he is also a ridiculous snob, rejoicing in an absurd title bestowed on him in infancy by a Central European monarch, a *voyeur,* a complete scoundrel, and a figure of pathos. Unspeakable, in fact . . . Miss Hansford Johnson describes his adventures with a group of English tourists who are not much better, though rather more prosperous, than himself; she describes them very amusingly, and the whole book, which is kept, as it should be, on the level of caricature and farce, reads as if its author had enjoyed herself making it. Skipton himself is clearly modeled on Fr. Rolfe, alias Baron Corvo; Miss Hansford Johnson supplies a few extracts from his writings, which are excellent parodies of Rolfe's amalgam of "fine writing" and mad scurrility. It is possible that the presence of a real original to some degree restricted, as well as stimulated, Miss Hansford Johnson's creation and kept it within the boundaries of caricature; Skipton is bouncingly alive, but *predictably* alive, like Mr. Micawber. (At least he is so if you know about Fr. Rolfe; he might not be to a reader who did not know.) But with that qualification, *The Unspeakable Skipton* is a great success.

To Yasunari Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes* my response is ambiguous. In one way, I feel with confidence that this is the most assured artistic achievement of them all; in another, I feel it absurd for me to make any pronouncement whatever about it, since not only are the society, the manners, the moral values, it is conditioned by completely unknown to me, but even the particular custom—that of the tea-ceremony—which forms its frame of reference. The society described is clearly "traditional"—in spite of hints of its breaking up under influences modern and Western—in a way that Western society has ceased to be. "Manners" and "morals" still have a bearing on each other in Kawabata's society; that *mores* in Latin, *moeurs* in French, once meant both is now, for our society, nothing but philology. In the world of this novel, a person's taste in ceramics, in choosing and arranging flowers according to the seasons, in the performing of the tea-ceremony, may all be pointers to his or her character and intelligence. "The Shino jar stood naked in the midst of the alcove. Fumiko, if she were to see it, would no doubt think this treatment unkind." It is clear that for the reader who knows, that tells something of Fumiko—just as the fact that the hero had put roses and carnations ("all those Occidental flowers") in the same jar tells something of him. But what does it tell? The ignorant can only guess—and yet, in spite of ignorance, a remarkable awareness of the characters comes through the strangeness of their environment: an awareness also of a sombre moral tragedy whose essence could exist in any environment. Under the delicate elegance, the real story is sinister and tragic; it is a story of a curse which was caused by sin and which passes from father to son. If I look for parallels to this

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novel, I think of *La Princesse de Clèves* or *Adolphe* or even the tragedies of Racine (parallels in English would be hard to find). I am not suggesting that this is as great a work as those, but it does have in common with them a disciplined restrictiveness in action and speech, contrasting with and intensifying the fierceness of the drama; and it has too—what Western novelists might profitably emulate—the brevity which springs from confidence to leave out and strength to refrain from insisting.

Between this novel and Benjamin DeMott's *The Body's Cage* there may seem no resemblance, and indeed between the actual works there is little enough. But in both you can feel—never enforced but always present—the sense of a community with a code of behaviour of its own, and in both the drama springs from a curse, which is brought down by the breaking of the code and which destroys the children of the breaker. The code of the American small-town world which is the setting of *The Body's Cage* seems a great deal more inchoate, less subtle, less civilised, than that of Kawabata's Japan; the behaviour it leads to is much more uncouth and violent: but this book too has a claim to be called true tragedy. An act of adultery in the past has led to the dominating of a family by a woman who is really a witch, though a witch who believes herself to be an angel of light. She is a "faith-healer"; her "healing" destroys the body of the adulterer's daughter and the souls of his wife and son. That is the central theme; round it is the community of the town, the upholders of the code, represented by the doctor and minister; they are roused at last by the evil in their midst, but are roused too late and for motives which are impure, and when they intervene they fail. The story is told by a technique of slow revealing, intricate but justified, and in a dense loaded style: the effect is a gathering sultriness. It has no signs at all of the half-digested, the quasi-autobiographical, usually detectable in first novels. I found it a remarkable achievement; it might be the start of a notable novelist.

Notes on Contributors *(cont.)*

NORMAN N. HOLLAND has recently published a book on Restoration comedy, *The First Modern Comedies*.

ELENA CROCE CRAVERI is the daughter of Benedetto Croce, and a distinguished literary critic, anthologist, and scholar in her own right. She is at present engaged in collecting an anthology of modern European and American poetry in Italian translation.

IRVING HOWE, author of *Politics and the Novel* and other critical books, has recently edited an anthology, *Modern Literary Criticism*, for Beacon Press.

The Body's Cage, a first novel by BENJAMIN DE MOTT, was published this spring by Atlantic-Little, Brown. It is reviewed in this issue.

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IRVING HOWE

The "Second Generation"

ONE REASON I FOUND *The Picaresque Saint*[1] an interesting book is that it is clearly *meant* to be interesting. Unlike many recent works of criticism, it asks to be read as a book and not as a manual of expertise from which teachers may snatch classroom tips. Mr. Lewis tries to inform, stimulate and even please the common reader—that necessary fiction who if he no longer exists will again have to be invented, since only his assumed presence makes it tolerable for critics to keep writing books for each other. Mr. Lewis doesn't propose a revolutionary new critical method; indeed, he may well be told by graduate students that, since he doesn't confine himself to "the text," his book is not literary criticism at all. Nevertheless, it seems to me a book that has a chance of surviving momentary fashions and proving valuable to readers thirty or forty years from now, readers who may wonder why intellectuals used to talk so much about "values" and "crises." I don't know what else a critic could ask for.

The Picaresque Saint also marks a distinct advance in Mr. Lewis' development as a critic. His earlier work, always well-informed and intelligent, struck me as stodgy; I sometimes found myself thinking of him as an Owlish Young Critic, perhaps most stuffily so in his bilious celebration of R. P. Blackmur. But now, having passed into those middle years where relaxation is possible and gaiety conceivable, he writes with seriousness but hardly a trace of pomposity. And for the first time he seems deeply engaged by his subject.

Unlike most younger critics, who have inherited their literary admirations, Mr. Lewis is drawn to what he calls the "second generation" of 20th century novelists—Silone, Camus, Malraux, Moravia—those who if regarded strictly as novelists seem less venturesome and certainly less "universal" in their achievement than the great figures immediately preceding them. The "second generation" consists of writers whose dominant experience was that of having come after:—after the technical innovations of Joyce and Proust; after the social collapse that had been prefigured in the work of these older writers; after the moment when it was still possible for writers to feel sustained either by political radicalism or the worship of art. The older writers are exiles and, by comparison, almost hermits; the second generation is committed to action in the social world and to the idea of belief. Writers like Malraux, Camus and Silone use the novel as a means for rediscovering "the sense of the human:" that which in traditional fiction was hardly a problem since it could simply be taken for granted. They feel that this sense, almost obliterated in our time, has to be

[1] THE PICARESQUE SAINT, by *R. W. B. Lewis*. Lippincott. $6.00.

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preserved as a sacred memory, somewhat like the trumpet in Silone's *A Handful of Blackberries.* It is this obligation—an obligation reaching its most poignant form in Pasternak's work—which seems to Mr. Lewis the distinctive mark, indeed the true heroism, of these writers. Very probably it is the reason that some of their work may fade with time; but also the reason that both as writers and men they seem so close to many of us.

The second generation writers, as Mr. Lewis remarks, are "agonizingly dedicated to life" (and the very fact that his adjective seems appropriate to the rest of the phrase goes far toward justifying his rough division of generations). These writers seek an intellectual and moral way out more insistently than did Joyce or Proust or even Mann, for their response is "to center not upon the ubiquity of sickness and of death but on the act of living." Each of them, Malraux and Silone most notably but also Camus, brings to bear upon his work a strong predisposition toward ideology and an equally strong awareness of how dangerous ideology can be. Still, they search for new images of survival and compassion in a "tragic fellowship" with the victims of their age.

In each of his six writers (Malraux, Moravia, Camus, Faulkner, Silone and Graham Greene) Mr. Lewis skillfully traces the way a burgeoning sense of companionship is embodied in the forms of fiction—Silone with intellectual ripeness and tender humor, Moravia never quite reaching the goal yet full of a suppressed yearning for it, *etc., etc.* Mr. Lewis then tries to isolate from their work a central figure, "the representative hero of the contemporary novel—the figure of the saint who shares more than bread and wine, who shares the very sufferings of mankind, participates in them, as a way of touching and submitting to what is most *real* in the world today."

This unheroic hero is full of weakness and depression; indeed, his heroism often consists in a willingness to recognize that he shares with other men an ultimate and inescapable vulnerability. He is "the outcast who enters in, dedicated not so much, or not immediately, to a supernatural god as to what yet remains of the sacred in the ravaged human community." He is likely to be somewhat of a rogue, both through the force of necessity and because of his contempt for the bourgeois order. Sometimes he is an ex-Communist who has dirtied his hands and feels both the shame of his past and a certain contempt for those who take pride in having avoided that past. In short, he is a version of Pietro Spina, hero of *Bread and Wine,* that beautiful novel which to Mr. Lewis—I think he is right—seems a central work of the imagination in our time. And again in short, Mr. Lewis' book elaborates upon Camus' remark that the only important problem is whether it is today possible to be a saint without believing in God. Mr. Lewis seems to feel, however, that even this would not be quite enough and that perhaps these rogue saints may yet find their way to God.

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The book profits greatly from having a theme of intellectual consequence running through its chapters. Such a theme, merely by its presence, lends a tone of urgency to the writing; but it also creates some vexing problems for Mr. Lewis. As reviewers have noticed, he has to push and pull in order to force his writers into the scheme of the book. The division into generations, which in general seems to me both sensible and useful, has been challenged on the ground that, among the older writers, Mann was at least as ideological as some of the later figures; it can also be challenged on the ground that both in theme and technique Faulkner is usually closer to Joyce than to any of the other writers whom Mr. Lewis discusses. True, he confines himself almost entirely to *The Bear* and *A Fable,* the only novels where any evidence might be found for regarding Faulkner as a writer of transcendence or resolution; most of his novels, and unquestionably the best of them, focus on "the ubiquity of sickness and of death" which Mr. Lewis regards as a distinctive motif of the generation of Joyce.

More important is the fact that the picaresque saint, glad as one is to have his features so well described, does not appear very often in some of Mr. Lewis' writers. I cannot find him in Moravia; the conditions for his presence are established in Camus' novels, but he himself seldom appears; and as for Faulkner—his Isaac McCaslin may be saintly but he is not very picaresque. The figure Mr. Lewis has projected comes mainly from Silone's books and there, to be sure, he can be observed in a series of rich transformations; he can also be found in a number of Graham Greene's novels; but beyond that Mr. Lewis is hard—and needlessly—put to justify his scheme. Moreover, when he is writing well, he usually forgets it for pages on end.

Critics have a right to present such schemes in a tentative way and to ask their readers not to take them too solemnly; but Mr. Lewis would surely have done better to confine himself to analyzing his writers as members of a generation who share distinctive problems and attitudes. My complaint is tactical rather than fundamental, since what matters are the individual studies in their own right. And here we come up against a recurrent, perhaps inevitable difficulty in thematic criticism: that the critic is enormously tempted to overpraise the work of a writer whom he had included mainly in order to round out a thesis.

The Picaresque Saint contains, for example, several wildly overgenerous pages on Steinbeck, and I think that in another context Mr. Lewis, not having to hunt for saintly rogues, would immediately see how false a writer Steinbeck is. In dealing with Faulkner he tends to make him seem too pious, too much of a Moral Spokesman, and the result is that he himself gets rather pious. Noting that there is "a kind of deadness" at the center of *A Fable* (yes, the deadness that comes from a self-conscious straining toward profundity) Mr. Lewis

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adds: "*A Fable* carries a certain theme and style further than art may carry them; perhaps it fails; but so did Orpheus." To which it might be said in reply: Orpheus was not a novel. In any case, Mr. Lewis' solemnity seems all the more annoying when in the following pages, Orpheus notwithstanding, he goes on to show exactly what is wrong with *A Fable.*

The chapter on Camus is extremely good on the level of dialectic, but the danger, again, is that by treating his ideas with such seriousness Mr. Lewis tends to assume the value of Camus' novels and does not investigate whether there is a thinness of representation, a transparency of motive, an evisceration of behavior, which keep them from reaching the first rank. The chapter on Graham Greene raises still more difficulties. Mr. Lewis has done a remarkable job of persuasion here, and if one entrusts oneself to his guidance, agreeing to forget the melodramatic naivete and spiritual sensationalism that run through Greene's novels, one can join him in regarding Greene as a major writer. But this would be a bad mistake. Greene provides a slick, often "entertaining" but fundamentally cheap caricature of all that is most valuable in "second generation" fiction. It is true that one can find in his work a number of the themes or concerns that are also present in Silone's—all the more reason, therefore, to distinguish sharply between the counterfeit and the genuine. Mr. Lewis, I think has been guilty here of that form of special pleading which F. R Leavis used wickedly to call "Christian discrimination"; and it is this, not his difficulties in aligning his writers with his scheme, that constitutes the major weakness of *The Picaresque Saint.*

But about the central chapter of the book, a lengthy essay on Silone, there can hardly be any dispute. Even critics who feel that Mr. Lewis overestimates the importance of Silone's work (I am not among them) would surely agree that he has provided a splendid exposition concerning the structure of Silone's narratives, the quality of his vision and the circumstances in which his novels were composed. Mr. Lewis' study is a significant vindication of the biographical approach to fiction (an approach which, as he understands, cannot be *merely* biographical). It is simply a fact that one's grasp of, one's capacity for savoring, Silone's novels is greatly helped by the rich and sympathetic account Mr. Lewis offers of the Italian writer's early life and political career. For example, one learns a great deal about the emotional sources—indeed, the very language—of Silone's novels from Mr. Lewis' description of the arrest of Silone's brother Romolo by the fascist police on the fantastic charge of trying to assassinate Victor Emmanuel III.

> . . . Romolo and the others were finally convicted, not of attempted assassination but simply of belonging to the Communist Party. To this crime, of which he was no less innocent, Romolo had in fact confessed—not because he could withstand no more punishment, but as an act of participation in his brother's suffering. "I

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tried to behave," Romolo wrote Silone from Prison, *"as I imagined you would have behaved in my place."* Romolo was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. He served only four; brutal treatment and tuberculosis ended his life in 1932, in the penitentiary at Procida.

Romolo's extraordinary words, which I have italicized, read exactly like one of those quixotic statements that occasionally spring from the lips of Silone's characters, statements which fill Western critics with embarrassed disbelief. They are words that ought to teach us to be a little less cocksure in dismissing Silone as a contriver of idylls merely because he still tries in his novels to evoke the human capacity for goodness and moral chivalry. If for nothing else, such bits of information would leave us in Mr. Lewis' debt; but the chapter as a whole, through a tactful interlacing of biography and literary analysis, goes very far toward displaying the resilience, the humor and the exquisite moral qualities of Silone's work.

But it does not go all the way, and the reason, I think, is that Mr. Lewis is, for all his warmth and cordiality toward Silone, not finally of Silone's "kind." The experiences that were central for Silone were political experiences, and these do not quite assume full reality for Mr. Lewis until he can (in his phrase) "convert" them to religious sentiments or categories. Every critic worth reading has his own predispositions, and Mr. Lewis' "conversions" might not matter at all were it not that, in this case, they occasionally lead to a subtle kind of injustice in reading Silone's novels.

From first to last these novels have dealt with the problem of politics as, in its proclaimed quest to extend the bounds of humaneness, it becomes inhumane. This tempts Mr. Lewis into writing that the dominant theme of the novels "is not, after all, a political theme." In another passage he writes that between 1917 and 1931 Silone "played out the singular role of the religious radical trying to make his love of men effective by the techniques of political revolution . . . The role turned out to be impossible—but it may have been necessary, for one of the chief forms taken by the religious aspiration in our century has been—has had to be—the political."

This seems to me not quite accurate. For good or bad Silone was a thoroughly political person both before and during the years he wrote his major books, and to call him a "religious radical" during the period of his most intense party activity is either to stretch the term "religious" so far as to void it of disciplined meaning or to misuse the rights of retrospection. Politics runs in Silone's blood; like many people who have gone through the Marxist experience, he could not evade it even if he wished to. It is certainly true that he became profoundly dissatisfied with traditional Marxist and party politics—that, indeed, is the springboard for his earlier books—and it is also true

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that in trying to "deepen" or "humanize" politics he found himself employing a vocabulary which borrowed from religious sources, seeking for *examples* in the Christian stories that would be relevant to the kind of politics he now desired, and thinking of the crucifixion of Christ as a decisive *human* instance. But unless we are to indulge in the sentimental aggrandizement that is so characteristic of much neo-religious thought in our day, this does not constitute religious belief and it is an error to write of Silone's politics, in or out of his books, as if they require "translation" into religious terms.

But at least as often as Mr. Lewis commits this error, he also manages to avoid it. He writes at one point that "for a long time, Silone, too, thought he believed that politics was everything. It need only be added that, having once thought politics was everything, Silone does not now desperately assert that politics is nothing." And in still another sentence he says that Pietro Spina, hero of *Bread and Wine,* "does not become a priest, but absorbs a portion of the priestly role into his secular mission." That, I think, is exactly right and it says what Mr. Lewis had previously questioned: that in some basic sense the dominant themes in Silone's novels are political.

But does all this matter very much? One can easily imagine a young critic who takes pride in having no opinions or beliefs suggest that Lewis, being interested in religion, tries to appropriate Silone for religion, and Howe, being interested in politics, tries to appropriate him for politics. Well, it *could* be that, of course; but it happens not to. Or one can imagine a somewhat more sophisticated suggestion that in an age where critics inevitably bring to their readings one or another ideological bias it must simply be accepted that each will see a given work in terms of his own interests and needs. It is tempting to let the matter go at that, relaxing, in effect, into a kind of radical skepticism; and in some instances one may not be able to do anything else. But I think it would be an abdication of critical responsibility for either myself or Mr. Lewis, in the disagreement he will have with me at this point, to let it go at radical skepticism. For there is always the possibility of a particular judgment in which the critic must be ready to acknowledge that it is his responsibility not to "convert" the terms of a work into those that satisfy his predispositions. This is probably harder to do in the middle of the twentieth century than it has been for a very long time in the past; but one can and should try. And there is a simple rule-of-thumb that ought to be applied as frequently as it will work: *be loyal to the "surface" of the text, persist in treating it in its own terms as much as you possibly can, and "convert" to other terms only when and if there is no alternative.* It is this "rule" which provides, I think, a major support for my disagreement with Mr. Lewis in regard to the nature of Silone's novels.

In any case: Mr. Lewis has written a thoughtful, illuminating and admirable book.

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BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Back to Jessie

As EVERYONE KNOWS, John Speirs is the English myth and ritual man. He has been attacked in his own country by M. J. C. Hodgart, in *Twentieth Century*, and praised in America by Stanley Edgar Hyman, in *Kenyon Review* and *New Mexico Quarterly*. The ground of the attack is that Speirs thinks a poem based on myth and ritual is thereby a better poem than one which is not so based. The ground of the praise is that Speirs's sense of the relations of poetry and myth is far subtler than that of most writers who share his interests.

In fairness it should be said that the terms used by both commentators are, on Speirs's view, too narrow to do his book[1] justice. He wishes to be known as a critic, and likes being called "the myth and ritual man" about as much as Hodgart (who has written about ballads) and Hyman (who has taught at Bennington) would like to be called ballad men or Bennington men. When he formulates his purpose he rejects the title of specialist: "This book was . . . conceived as a deliberate attempt . . . to lift medieval English poetry out from the professional 'Middle English' specialism." And his first effort is to persuade his reader not that talk of myth and ritual is relevant to the body of poetry in question, but that old-fashioned academic scholarship is irrelevant.

The method of this undertaking is conventional enough. As in a thousand "critical" Ph.D. theses of the missionary period (*ca.* 1935-1950), the writer begins by noting that there are two kinds of literary inquirer in his field, one scholarly the other critical, and proceeds to define the difference between them. The medieval scholar is a shut-in, a person who has failed to keep up: at best he is dull, at worst he is vague and slack, "naive and unreliable," "remote from modern literature—and from life," and uninterested in good books (he may have read *Lear* and *Macbeth* and *Anna Karenina* but he has certainly not "profoundly experienced" them). The critic on the other hand has profoundly experienced Tolstoy and Shakespeare. The critic has in his bones the key documents of modern criticism—Eliot's essay about tradition, for example ("One work of literature," Speirs writes, "finds its place in relation to other works . . . When a new, a truly original work of literature appears, it alters the whole standard . . . "). The critic is a firm believer in the poem itself ("For the critic," Speirs writes, "the words are always the test, the final check—the words in their context, and that is neither more nor less than the whole text"). The critic knows about complexity and about the theory of the rich reading ("The critic's task is to arrive at the fullest possible reading which is at the same time an accurate reading"). And the critic has kept up (in Speirs's index under D, to choose

[1] MEDIEVAL ENGLISH POETRY—THE NON-CHAUCERIAN TRADITION, by *John Speirs*. Macmillan. $6.50.

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a letter, one finds Dante, Christopher Dawson, De la Mare, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Dryden, *Duineser Elegien*, H. Flanders Dunbar the anthropologist, as well as a sprinkle of references to medieval poems). The critic is, in sum, alive, eager (as the scholar is not) to hold converse with the sophisticated, and positive that he and his subject will be able to hold their own.

The obvious first assumption of all this distinction-making is that the scholar, a poor dead horse, is not dead. The assumption is false, but to confront it is to be reminded that scholars of the old philological discipline that began with Anglo-Saxon and Middle English did last longer, in America, than any others. Twenty-five years ago, when the figure of the condescending student-critic was already familiar, and editors were learning to regard themselves as zombies, some able graduate students could still contemplate with satisfaction the idea of sitting out on a beach at the Cape, mss. in hand, helping a great scholar worry through his edition of the *Canterbury Tales*. The phrase "love of learning" was said even then, no doubt, in inverted commas, and elder scholars (in later periods of English) were hastening to get into "something critical," having smoked the trend—but the philologist went on taking his profession seriously. Until quite recently he was able to withstand attempts to scratch his courses from the required list; and, although as the years passed he had fewer and fewer students, he retained a sniffish dignity and managed now and then to persuade an administrator to speak well of him. A sense of these accomplishments, of the philologist's position as an adequate symbol of the last academic age—the time when learned men had power and lively men ate dirt—makes one hesitate to embrace all Speir's prejudices.

To do more than hesitate, though, would be to lay it on rather thick. The cynic can say that recitals of the cant of modern criticism, like the one in the present work, are duller than the "surveys of previous scholarship" they have replaced, and that the loss of a learned discipline at the start of a professional education is responsible for the permissive attitude toward ignorance now current in the graduate schools. He can claim that all the young men in America who are presently engaged in "rehabilitating" medieval or Anglo-Saxon literature, whinnying about point of view in Chaucer and Langland, are simply displaced exegetes of *The Bear*. He can even seek to idealize the last passengers on the decrepit philological bus, postwar graduate students who took up medieval literature at a time when it was still assumed that, in this field at least, a student ought to know something beside Jessie Weston and Tolstoy in translation. But such talk ignores many facts. A decade ago, at the end of the first year of English graduate school when the majority was burning its word cards and crowding the Joyce seminar, the philologist still had to dig in at Old French, Old Norse, Gothic, and the rest. But by then the philologist's morale, to speak of that,was very low indeed. After a long, slow disintegration, the old discipline had become a depressing second choice, a kind of infirmary entered for a rest after too many sessions with instructors drunk

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on Empson or Korzybski: it was taken seriously only in the course catalogue. Today the latter is bare of any requirements that conceivably could be called a new discipline (the reading of *Finnegans Wake* is not yet a requirement), but by a seeming paradox there *are* stirrings of life in the basic subjects of the one that has been discarded. Honest students of linguistics are turning up again (they go off to work with men like Prof. Whatmough, constructing vanished languages from tomb inscriptions); and there is a quantity of evidence that people who do concentrate in Middle English and Anglo-Saxon—"critics" all—are now full of zeal, busy setting off cherry bombs instead of, as before, ducking them.[2] What appears likely, in short, is that in America the revolution tardily announced in Speirs's book has helped to alter a situation in which subjects not intrinsically dull had to be regarded as dull, and if that is the case, the revolution ought to not be taken as the ground of cheap nostalgia. The only fair question to ask about it is: what are its promises and how much does it deliver?

The first promise Speirs makes—that he will discriminate the best, point out the essential medieval poetry—is a shade too grand. Few interesting minds have written about this poetry lately, but editors and historians have kept the best in view. Everyone knows that *Gawain* is a great poem and that the Towneley playwright was an artist, and the existing selections of early English lyrics are by no means crammed with errors of taste. Like that of most critics, Speirs's performance must be judged by the descriptions and definitions it offers, not alone by its choices of subject.

The verdict on these counts cannot be a simple one, for *Medieval English Poetry* is, whether taken on its own terms or others, an uneven production. The book appears to have grown out of an essay on *Gawain* printed in *Scrutiny* in 1949; it contains chapters on "the carols and other songs and lyrics," the mystery plays, the English romances (including four Breton lays), and works from the so-called alliterative revival. The essay on *Gawain* (placed in the middle of the present volume) is a first-rate piece of writing, fresh, exuberant, and just in commendation. Its argument—that *Gawain* is a "midwinter festival poem," with a seasonal theme at its center—is built up from a "hint in some of the observations of the anthropologists." But after acknowledging this, Speirs promptly, if inelegantly, asserts his recognition that in taking the hint he is not relieved of "his own responsibility and function of criticism of the particular poem in itself." And he does not evade the responsibility: his essay is engaged in the task of assessing the quantity of felt life expressed in the poem. Gawain riding on his quest for the Green Chapel passes into the "Northern European Waste Land, the Utgard of Norse mythology"—but Speirs sensibly reminds

[2] The enthusiasm of some of these types is, in fact, exemplary. One of them, a true socking-machine of a young critic, let it be known on his dust jacket that he had produced no fewer than thirty major critical articles before he was thirty years old—or was he forty? (The jacket covered a book about the *Canterbury Tales*, a sluggish documentation of the news that Chaucer was a quite dramatic writer.) Here, surely, is progress: a philologist would have had to work for forty years to come by enough material for half that many pieces.

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his reader that the "actuality of the experience of desolation . . . depends upon the actuality of [the] winter landscape." He sees this actuality as a matter of the "distinctness and accuracy of sensation . . . the sharpness or piercingness of the sensory impressions and the subtlety with which these are distinguished and differentiated." And when he quotes passages to support his claims, his eye for the telling moments in them is precise.

This is not to claim, peace to Speirs's detractors, that *The Golden Bough* casts no shadow on the essay: vegetation deities, Tarot pack, waste land—the familiar terms appear frequently and much space is spent in establishing their relevance. But the critic does look past them. Under F. R. Leavis's influence (not Jessie Weston's), he takes as his key terms *specification*, *actuality*, *distinctness*, *reality*, *life*, and *life-significance*, and keeps them at the center of his discourse.[3] The result is that the reader is never asked to admire a mere allusion to a nature rite, and comes to regard the anthropological vocabulary as a useful means of sorting out ranges of feeling.

Elsewhere the tale is different. As if unaware that his strength lay in his openness, Speirs moved on from the *Gawain* essay to frame a formula —one which made it impossible for him to continue using anthropological terms in cautious, seemingly incidental fashion. The formula can be stated thus: evidence in a poem of the survival of sympathy for the nature rites of the old religion equals greater adequacy to experience equals superior imaginative literature. As formulas go, this may be a good one. Its effect as used is to work a troubling transformation of a period of history; the Church is seen as irrevelant to the main stream of the English Middle Ages—an old, worn-out hag suffered to eat breadcrumbs in the mudhuts while the able-bodied Ubangi and other mushroom cults of the upper and lower Thames were out at Council Fire, whooping up cha-chas for the sun god and otherwise getting on with the serious business of devotion. But history has cunning passages, and Speirs's formula does have sound logic in back of it. Probably a poet can more easily pronounce normatively on human life—on works and days—if he writes at a time when poetry is so close to the roots of things that it does not merely talk about the vital relations of man and nature, but becomes one of these relations. Hegel would have been sure of this, Lawrence was sure of this . . . All that can safely be said against the formula is that it *is* a formula, and that a critic committed to a formula may have difficulty in seeing beyond it.

Speirs's difficulty appears in a variety of ways. He chooses an inferior version of a poem—the fifteenth century *Quia Amore Langueo* rather than the fourteenth—on no apparent grounds save that the lines in which he finds an allusion to a sick king or a heavenly Huntsman fail to appear in the superior version. He admits to his chapter on carols and other lyrics only poems containing a scrap identifiable as a mythic element,

[3] In the acknowledgments Leavis is spoken of as "the great critic to whom my generation has owed so much." The debt here appears to include not only the critical vocabulary (with its partial dependence on the authority of Lawrence), but also the special sense of history—it cannot be called a myth, since L. C. Knights is behind it—that locates Eden in the time before the decay of housekeeping.

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with the result that these pages read like an all too thoroughly specialized monograph on the survival of such elements. He offers a series of lengthy summaries of romances that has no visible purpose except to establish the frequency of the questing motive. So strong is his fascination with the turning seasons that he is always in danger of finding A Moving Moment in the flattest assertion— Spring then came. He makes out the Towneley Noah play (noteworthy for a few bolt ends of common life) to be a moving "dramatic poem," an "ordered and unified structure," a Biblical narrative "reanimated and recreated [by] the seasonal theme of the Nature rituals, the festivals of the Year"—despite the truth that the play has no movement of feelings that can be followed in human terms, and very little distinction in its verse. Writing about the versions of the shepherds' play (Mak tossed in the blanket "*is*" the Hanged Man, the sheep in the cradle is The Horned God), he displays the eagerness to drain off the local urgencies of a poem that has marked the clumsiest specialist of his kind.[4] And throughout his book, except in the *Gawain* chapter and in some pages on *Wynnere and Wastoure* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, his generalizations are less often reassessments of "particular poems in themselves" than they are mere reassertions of the critic's position ("art here has not departed far from its ritual origin, and is here more complete art for that very reason").

If the author of *Medieval English Poetry* had done no more than over-value an abstraction, there would be every reason to assume that his severe critics—Hodgart for one—would be able in time to set him straight. It is not impossible, after all, to make an intelligent man see why, in literature, a confluence of religious traditions bears only on itself rather than on the question of quality; neither is it so difficult to establish that description of literary achievement is more valuable, and more possible, than "explanation." (Anyone who doubts Speirs's powers of description should look not only at the *Gawain* essay but at the excellent paragraphs on the storm and the grisly ghost of *The Awntyrs of Arthure*.) But alas Speirs did not simply fall victim to an abstraction: he went on to don the robes of the Moral Critic, the weigher-up of modern life and society, in course of recommending it. And once a man has experienced the exaltation of this cloth, it is not easy to recall him to his best self.

What Speirs says in the moralizing line is neither better nor worse than what most people say. (He says that, just as wholeness in art depends on the achievement of a vital relation to a ritual past, so wholeness in life, a full response to experience, requires the achievement of a relationship to nature like the one articulated in the old religion.) But implicit in the saying of it is, aside from the hint of pretentiousness, a queer insensitivity to the limits of a book of more or less practical criticism. Sophistication of the literary sort is a great respecter of the principle that a fish (the prac-

[4] First Shepherd's complaint is doubtless not purely social: "We ar so hamyd,/ fortaxed and ramyd,/ We ar mayde hand tamyd,/ with thyse gentlery men." But it takes on no new force when the critic speaks of it as a response to winter, "the season when the life energies that hold all things together begin to fail. . . "

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tical critic) must not talk like a whale (Moses). He who begins speaking in the voice of the sensible fellow who aspires to understand texts, not mysteries, must go on speaking in this voice and be content, like ordinary men, to stand far back out of the light. He who wishes to talk about wholeness in life must step forward early on and get himself accepted (or rejected) as an imperious intelligence with a deeper than ordinary sense of life. Speirs steps forward too late and too uncertainly to register as a sage. He rises in his conclusion to a contrast between Then (vitality and amplitude) and Now (thinness and febrility), but the reader, puzzled by the change of tone, does not stir; he waits instead for the verbal wink that will tell him the author too is thinking of this as the Merrie England part of the show. And when, in place of a wink, Speirs delivers four hundred words from D. H. Lawrence ("Now you have a poor, blind, disconnected people with nothing but politics and bank-holidays to satisfy the eternal human need of living in ritual adjustment to the cosmos in its revolutions, in eternal submission to the greater laws, etc."), the reader remembers how Lawrence himself felt about Lawrencemen, and what Lawrence told Frieda that day when, while they were riding, she allowed that it was "wonderful" to feel the horse's great thighs moving beneath her. Lawrence said, Rubbish, that she should be quiet, that she felt nothing of the sort and had only been reading his books.

Few things are clearer, of course, than that all final chapters are fraught with awful temptations—dwelling on the point in any particular instance is perhaps inhumane. But it does no harm to record the impression that for critics of anthropological or mythological cast these temptations are especially intense. Such writers seem to be driven on toward the messianic note—a note obviously no more relevant to the doctrine of "the text in itself" than to the history of the great vowel shift. To say that, driven or lax, critics must keep in mind the laws of tone is not to crucify the author of *Medieval English Poetry* on an i-umlaut or to lose him in a generalizing shuffle or to predict that his revolution is doomed or to deny his achievement—one thoroughly pleasing and illuminating essay in criticism. It is only to say that like many in the great new flock of doctors now pasturing in the age of faith, he shares the common lot of Literary Man, and may have to acknowledge this (not merely scrap his formula), before he can write another.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

In the Absence of Yeats[1]

"THERE HASN'T BEEN A POEM in ten years," said the instructor, "that has captured my attention. In fact, poetry has been dead for fifty years." He smiled, and developed his theme. "Where is Yeats? There isn't anyone like Yeats around." I said that there were some young poets now writing who might in time be very good indeed. Pressed to name them, I mentioned half a dozen. "I've never heard of them," he said. That clinched the argument. I left him sipping his coffee, and on the way home thought of replies I might have made. I might have said that I knew several young men and women who were writing poems and that they were sure that they were poets; also, that when Yeats was a young man there was no one like Yeats around. The trouble is, I told him, *you're* not a poet, and so you hope poetry is dead. Who are you, anyway? The phantom merely continued to smile; I suspected that if Yeats had been sitting where I was, it would not have made a bit of difference. The Spirit that Says No would have told him that there hadn't been a poem since "Maud" that had captured its attention, and that there wasn't anyone around like Tennyson.

Instructors of English are not the best audience for poetry; they don't want anything added to the teaching load. But I have seen the same base satisfaction on the faces of perfectly decent, ordinary people. "Poetry is dead—hooray, that's one less thing we'll have to feel!" Music is also dying, and so is painting, and in a little while, to paraphrase Fitzgerald, we shall all be safely dead.

However, the twenty books in front of me show that some people still consider that writing poetry is important, and the contents of five of these books assure me that it is. The rest are evidence that though the art of poetry is not dead, the arts of reading, publishing and judging it may be. It is strange that after an age of criticism we are no better able to deal with new work. Or is this a necessary consequence? Has criticism become an end in itself and lost all practical purpose? Sophisticated as we are, we seem no less likely to be sucked in by the meretricious than were readers of forty years ago who did not have our advantages. Consider Mr. Ned O'Gorman's *The Night of the Hammer*. It is a thoroughly synthetic book, and the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1958. Mr. O'Gorman's verse always seems to be running a fever. Rheto-

[1] THE NIGHT OF THE HAMMER, by *Ned O'Gorman*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.75. HEART'S NEEDLE, by *W. D. Snodgrass*. Knopf. $3.75. ODDMENTS INKLINGS OMENS MOMENTS, by *Alastair Reid*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $3.75. PLAYS & POEMS 1948-58, by *Elder Olson*. University of Chicago Press. $4.00. FIGHTING TERMS, by *Thom Gunn*. Hawk's Well Press. $.75. THE SENSE OF MOVEMENT, by *Thom Gunn*. University of Chicago Press. $2.75.

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ric is substituted for every natural use of language; there are no feelings in this poetry, only attitudes. The reader, bombarded with far-fetched images and metaphors, soon ceases to think that the shocks are necessary. For example, here are lines from "A Description of the Sea for Lina Lenzi Who Has Never Seen It":

There's the noise of the noon
bus in it, like a swoon
of girls hollering with rage
that Tom, decrepit cat, had
chewed their darling captive
in its cage. Or a fix of soldiers
pale from urging priests from sleep
and saints from pinnacles
rail on a hill and rock the air
with cannon. That's the sea,
my simile of the mind's famine.

Why is this a description of the sea? Would it not do as well for a traffic jam, or a hay-field, or a rhinoceros? Then, note the fashionable clichés of thought and language: girls holler (an Amurricun touch; salty); the "darling captive in its cage" will remind you, if you are literary enough, of Skelton's sparrow; a "fix" of soldiers will call to mind a pride of lions and all those other abstract collective nouns from the bestiary, recently imitated to death; priests and saints make their appearance, for since Hopkins they have had a certain success; and last, the poet reminds you that he is aware of what he is doing, that his matter is a simile and perfectly suitable for a graduate-school.

The pretentiousness of Mr. O'Gorman's book, and its getting an award, are not catastrophic, for bad writing is soon forgotten; but it is regrettable for a poet to be confirmed in his mistakes, and we may deplore the frigidity of the climate in which bombast is received as equal, indeed superior, to works of imagination. My other objection to these poems treads on sacred ground, but I will make it anyway: I don't like the use of religion in this poetry. I say "use," for though *The Night of the Hammer* frequently refers to the gear and tackle of religion, nowhere does it show religious conviction. The poem "On Saint Theresa's Difficulty in Keeping Her Feet on the Ground" describes the levitation of Saint Theresa in spite of attempts of the saint and her nuns to anchor her down. Ostensibly, it is a funny poem, but it seems irreverent to me. Perhaps, were I a Catholic I would not think it irreverent; or perhaps I am meant to feel that I am not a Catholic. (My opinion, if it matters, is that the impossible can hardly be humorous.) Many thumpable hymns and a few ingenious poems have been made out of religious belief, but I cannot imagine a successful poem which proposes religious experience as fact and then proceeds to make fun of the experience; this is eating one's cake and having it too, like

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thinking that crucifixes are decorative, and reading the Bible as literature, or like movies about attractive nuns.

I wish I could find a poem in Mr. O'Gorman's book to admire, but as five judges have admired it, I will pass without anxiety to W. D. Snodgrass's *Heart's Needle.* This poet, it seems, has been exposed to as much education as Mr. O'Gorman, but his poetry is not compounded of literary and classical references and striking attitudes. He is original; his ideas and language are never worked up to impress the reader; he carries his feelings as far as they can go, and no further. I think I could recognize a poem by Mr. Snodgrass anywhere, after reading only a few lines. He has managed to discover himself, and though the self is not in the grand manner, it is pervasive. He works at the other extreme from rhetoric; if anything, his tone is a little too relaxed. Now and then, from the light-moving stanzas there flashes a comment that startles by its appropriateness, and the phrasing at such moments is naturally perfect. Mr. Snodgrass recognizes the main task of the poet: to tell the truth and avoid falsifying. He has put on no fine masks to which his features must hereafter conform; he is free to develop. The occasional thinness of his poetry may be corrected by increasing the qualities he already has.

The ending of "The Marsh" shows this poet's originality. The marsh he trudges through is a weedy, stinking place (here, as in other descriptions, Mr. Snodgrass reminds me of the author of "Peter Grimes"):

You look up; while you walk
the sun bobs and is snarled
in the enclosing weir
of trees, in their dead stalks.
Stick in the mud, old heart,
what are you doing here?

The trick, of course, is in the last two lines; no amount of anything but talent could have invented that irrelevance. Or let us choose a stanza from "April Inventory." The argument is that the speaker, a teacher in a girls' school, is visibly decaying, while they are not; moreover, as he is not a scholar, he is falling behind his colleagues in the profession. He concludes:

Though trees turn bare and girls turn wives,
We shall afford our costly seasons;
There is a gentleness survives
That will outspeak and has its reasons.
There is a loveliness exists,
Preserves us, not for specialists.

The point is made lightly, yet it is vital, and it could scarcely be made more happily.

The sequence titled "Heart's Needle," on which the book is centered,

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recounts some emotional and practical difficulties entailed by the break-up of a marriage. Divorce may be to this century what the frontier was to the last; Mr. Snodgrass's poem is a sort of American epic. Here it all is: the ordeal of "visiting," the divided child, the staring reproachful toys, the nostalgia, the sticky trip to the zoo, and the necessary, useless expense of guilt. It may not be all poetry, but it seems terribly real, and as moral as anyone could wish. The speaker ends at the zoo in front of the cages:

If I loved you, they said, I'd leave
and find my own affairs.
Well, once again this April, we've
come around to the bears;

punished and cared for, behind bars,
the coons on bread and water
Stretch thin black fingers after ours.
And you are still my daughter.

Mr. Snodgrass's strength is in the language that is both ordinary and poetic, which Wordsworth recommended; in a time of much pedantry, *Heart's Needle* seems doubly original.

Alastair Reid also has a voice of his own, but there is nothing representative about his poetry. He does not write about common matters; the room on the other side of the mirror, the habits of ghosts and pigeons, preoccupy him. He is, I am tempted to think, Celtic; certainly, he is a poet of fancy and wonder, never afraid to write in a playful way of just what interests him, and no more. Modesty, when it goes hand in hand with talent, must always be praised; yet, I could wish that Mr. Reid were more on guard against a fault to which poets of fancy are exposed—whimsicality. The title of his book is an example of it. Having said this, I am happy to say that most of the poems in *Oddments Inklings Omens Moments* are delightful, and if I led the reader to think that Mr. Reid is always dealing with odd things, I should be sorry. Here is his poem "A Leavetaking":

What a day we parted on!
Sludge. Not a wink of sun.
Heavy headlines, traffic breakdowns.
Three damp children dressed as clowns.
A sobbing drunk on the corner, reeling.
The sky as smoke-stained as a ceiling.
Any two but she and I
would have been glad to say good-bye.
The houses bowed their heads in rows
as, with rain running down my nose,
I watched her go her ways,
a bright true tear across a dirty face.

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These lines have delicacy and strength and humor, with no forcing.

What I like best about Mr. Reid's poetry is that a leap of imagination is made before the poem starts; or, to put it another way, he starts with an extraordinary situation or idea, and writes it out. You do not feel that he is tinkering his way toward a poem. The difficulty of this is, you must have a mind to begin with. Seascapes, haunted rooms, women who gaze out of "jewelled" eyes,—these are not so much adornments of his verse as they are the properties of an ideal country in which his fancy lives. I hope that he will not altogether turn his back on the messy world in which we have to live.

Elder Olson's *Plays and Poems 1948-58* are a complete surprise to me. The plays alone would make this book valuable; the poems I find less attractive—they are sometimes didactic or derivative. In his plays Mr. Olson shows a lively handling of colloquial speech, and lifts it into poetry when necessary. Unlike most poet-playwrights, he has ideas, and moreover he can develop an exciting action. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" is perhaps the best of these short plays. The point of departure is the old fable, but what Mr. Olson's apprentices—average guys both—raise by their meddling, is . . . well, let him tell it:

Dick
Lookit him split that church in two.
Tom
Lookit him rip that bridge up—look!
Dick
Lookit him kick that hill aside!
Tom
Dja see him step across that river?
. . . . . .
Dick
Look, he's killing all the people!
Who we gonna rule if there ain't no people?
Where we gonna live if there ain't no cities?
. . . . . .
Dick
Hey—he's coming back—towards us!

The idea is a natural, which brings to mind Johnson's fatuous remark, that he saw nothing very original in *Gulliver's Travels,* for once one had the idea of big and little men, the rest which would follow.

In the "Carnival of Animals" Mr. Olson again has the gift of the obvious. The carnival audience is invited by the Man on Stage to stick pins into his wife, tied to a chair and with her mouth taped; then he invites them to saw her in two. After a long pause, someone enquires, "When you going to stick her together?"

Man on Stage
Stick her together? Stick her together?

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Gents, I ain't *gonna stick her together.*
I cer'nly ain't, and what's more, I can't.
(Sound: Uproar.)

Mr. C
Wait a minnit—wait a minnit!
What kind of magician are you,
Saw her apart, can't stick her together?

Man on Stage
Magician? *Whaddaya mean, magician?*
I never claimed I was no magician.
I said I had a bone to pick;
Blee me, folks, I picked *that bone.*

The poems, as I have said, are not so exceptional. This, for example, shows its model all too clearly:

Wild swans have cried out, with the cry
Of women in a tragedy
At the fall of a great house . . .

Yet, "Childe Roland, Etc." shares the originality of the plays and, like the plays, connects a curious, mythical framework to an informal world. Childe Roland sets out to confront an ogre who has terrorized a countryside, consuming cattle and deflowering women. However—

. . . the door opened.
I think I have never met a more charming person.
True, he was ugly, and—large; *but he had such a manner.*
You know how personality makes up for so much.

The ogre gives the visitor his side of the story, reads him his poems, and plays "some things of Chopin's . . . ." Childe Roland leaves reluctantly. Should he punish the villagers? But they are already singing and dancing. There is further news of the ogre:

Later, "he had eaten six men"; that very day
I had a little note from him—half invitation,
Half begging the name of a competent attorney.

My armor stands in the hall; I often think of my ancestors.
Was it different for them?
Nowadays, I observe, poetry is chiefly lyrical. . . .

Thom Gunn is one of the best poets now writing in English. He has great intelligence and knowledge of the world, expressed with music and wit. I don't agree with some of his ideas—with, for example, his admiration of disciplines, and his fascination with "toughness." I prefer his imagination. By this I mean his capacity to suppose a world more interesting and enduring than that of his own experience, and

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his reporting that world as fact. Mr. Gunn's best work is imaginative, as when, in *Fighting Terms,* he begins:

> *One night I reached a cave: I slept, my head*
> *Full of the air. There came about daybreak*
> *A red-coat soldier to the mouth, who said*
> *'I am not living, in hell's pains I ache,*
> But I regret nothing.'

In *The Sense of Movement,* his poems "Autumn Chapter in a Novel," "The Wheel of Fortune," "The Silver Age," and "St. Martin and the Beggar," are masterpieces of imagination, on the other hand, the poems titled—and the titles point to a heavy specificity—"The Unsettled Motorcyclist's Vision of His Death," "Elvis Presley," and "Market at Turk," are more circumstantial, and less interesting. Curiously, I find Mr. Gunn most arguable where he is undertaking to report what he sees. It is when imagination flags that we search for reasons. Occasionally he is didactic:

> *I think of all the toughs through history*
> *And thank heaven they lived, continually . . .*

And he admires Mr. Yvor Winters' finely trained and caged airedales. In contradiction to Mr. Gunn's opinions, I would like to suggest these authorities. First, there is Proust's remark that people who exercise a great deal may not be so much in possession of strength as they are in need of it. There is the advice of Conrad's old butterfly-collector, to immerse in the destructive element and let it bear you up. And last, there is Yeats's warning that the will cannot do for the imagination.

"Nowadays," said Childe Roland, ". . . poetry is chiefly lyrical." Certainly, the best of it seems to be so, and Thom Gunn's lyrics are memorable. His combining of song and idea in an ominous pastoral recalls the high spirits of Auden:

> *In fine simplicity*
> *I cry On either side*
> *Far as the eye can see*
> *These fields as green as wide*
> *Are my master's property.*

"The Silver Age" is a deeper music:

> *Do not enquire from the centurion nodding*
> *At the corner, with his head gentle over*
> *The swelling breastplate, where true Rome is found.*
> *Even of Livy there are volumes lost.*
> *All he can do is guide you through the moonlight.*

There is a clarity about Mr. Gunn's mind, and precision in his use of words; to these lyric qualities he adds dramatic and narrative elements that are beyond the reach of most of his contemporaries.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Mr. Haggin's Toscanini[1]

WRITTEN ACCOUNTS of "conversations" with famous artists are liable to read like carefully plotted vindictive exposures of one fatuity by another. Conversations are not as a rule substantial enough to merit print; the staging of a conversation compounds triviality with affectation; famous artists often have nothing to say beyond what they say as artists; critics who interview artists tend to develop a prickly resentment or conspiratorial vanity in the process, to imagine that this is talk between equals and therefore to impose their own nervous platitudes under the guise of questions. By now in any case, having kept up with the quarterlies, we are all so self-consciously knowledgeable about art that neither we nor the critics have anything to ask.

Besides, conversations with a virtuoso conductor! Just recall some of the *ex cathedra* pronouncements on music, art, the good life, war, and peace by Stokowski and Koussevitzky, of whom the latter even undertook an embarrassing Foreword to a new English version of Turgenev (they were both Russians); or observe the music lessons offered by that Eddie Fisher of conductors, TV's own Leonard Bernstein, who keeps assuring us that music won't hurt and then proves by his spasms on the podium that it certainly does. Finally, everyone knows that there is nobody to initiate the conversations since there is no such thing as a music critic: only comedians whose side-splitting double-talk fills a column with mock reports on performances by nonexistent performers of music that was never composed—as in this recent inventive spate of nonsense, by Mr. Haggin's successor on *The Nation,* about the novel problems posed in an alleged violin concerto which he assigns to somebody he amusingly calls "Roger Sessions":

> For the soloist does, in fact, play so much of the time, and his part is so highly evolved in an intellectual sense, that the listener's attention must be constantly, fully and intelligently engaged. That is not, in my opinion, an exorbitant demand. But it does mean that each minute shape in the solo line must be examined and related to its context. Following only general directional flows, broad melodic contours, or rhythmic expostulations will not . . .

Against this gabble of institutionalized buffoonery—the staple of what passes for music criticism in America—Mr. Haggin has been contending for thirty-six years by the honesty, the force, the continence, and the self-effacing lucidity of his own critical practice. So the book was not written by the ordinary sort of critic. Nor was Toscanini the

[1] CONVERSATIONS WITH TOSCANINI, by *B. H. Haggin.* Doubleday. $4.00.

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sort of famous artist who assumes that his views on Turgenev or world government are as necessary to the public as his performances of Beethoven, who (in other words) assumes that his claim on anyone's attention outside the area of his competence is more than personal and human: Mr. Haggin notes that Toscanini, dismissing Koussevitzky's extramusical pretensions, exclaimed, "I am not great man! Is enough to be a man!" The subject of the book is, then, the relation between a critic who has demonstrated, for over a third of a century, his understanding of the responsibilities of criticism and a great musician who was content, for all of his very long public life, to be a musician and only human besides. It is a beautiful and moving book.

Toscanini was one of those virtuoso performers whose explosive manifestations of what the press calls "artistic temperament" attract the special scrutiny of the malicious, the dilettantish, and the meanly idolatrous, several of whom have written books about "the man" Toscanini on the thesis that talented Italians speak in comic broken English and have notoriously bad tempers. Mr. Haggin's thesis is different: one of his services is to explain the manifestations of Toscanini's temper in the light of his talent—

> It is my impression that intelligent orchestra players didn't regard Toscanini's rages as mere self-indulgence by a man who could be reasonable and patient but felt privileged to be unreasonable and impatient. I think they understood that he was, in his relation to music, a man obsessed and possessed, and that such a man was not rational and reasonable—not in music nor in anything else; and some of them may have perceived what that remarkably perceptive critic, W. J. Turner, spoke of in a review of Toscanini's concerts in London in 1935. As he had sat watching Toscanini, Turner had been "suddenly reminded of Berlioz's remark, 'Do you think I make music for my pleasure?' I am certain that it is not a pleasure for Toscanini to conduct, but rather that he suffers. It is because of his extreme musical sensibility and intense concentration. Here lies the essence of his superiority."

Turner's insight was confirmed by Toscanini's own testimony:

> "... always conducting is great suffering for me. At home, with score, when I play piano, is great happiness. But with orchestra is great suffering—*sempre, sempre!* Even when I listen to record I am afraid horn will not play correct, clarinet will make mistake—*sempre, sempre!*"

And, in the most poignant moment of the book, Toscanini makes clear what, for a fanatically dedicated and marvelously gifted musician who was not worldly or sophisticated, who was in fact an anachronistic Garibaldian individualist in a new century that had learned how to convert his talent into dollars and prestige for entire industries—what

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it must have meant for such a man to be kept reminded that most people came to him not as to a man but as to a public figure who could be profitably used:

> . . . Toscanini sat down with me at the piano with the score of [Berlioz's] *Romeo* open before us, to listen to the recording of the broadcast. I listened and read; he conducted, gave entrance cues, sang, and occasionally pointed to something in the score, exclaiming: "This is *honest* performance: you can read it in score!"
>
> Later, as he was putting away the score, he looked at me with a smile and said: "Now, Haggin, what would you like?"
>
> "Anything you would like to hear," I answered.
>
> "No"—still smiling—"what would you like—what would you like to have?" And as I stared at him uncomprehendingly he added: "You come only to see me?"
>
> "Yes, of course," I managed to answer, so shocked that I didn't until later apprehend what he was telling me in this way; but then I did see what a revealing incident this was. My meetings with Toscanini were few and infrequent and limited in scope; and I didn't get to know him as his intimates did; but I did get to know him as I did—meaning that I think I learned some things about him which I feel sure of, no matter how they may appear to someone else. Those who have read the description of Toscanini's behavior in the Chotzinoff book may find it hard to accept the idea of his essential innocence; but I am thinking of a child's innocence which is sometimes retained up to the point where the young person comes face to face with some of the brutal and evil realities of adult existence and resorts to defenses and counter-attacks that may be unpleasant. I got an impression of such innocence in Toscanini . . .

There was, always, the musical sensibility whose functioning Mr. Haggin documents with such affectionate accuracy: the insistence on perfect clarity, the demand that "whatever was printed in the score must be audible in the performance" ("He showed me in the score [of Beethoven's *Consecration of the House* Overture] the places that were creating problems and difficulties—the bassoon part in one tutti, for example, about which he said, shaking his head dejectedly: 'I try everything but I am afraid I will never hear these bassoons' "); the respect for the composer's time-indications and the knowledge of what to do within the limits (so chafing to many other conductors) of these indications:

> . . . though it was Beethoven who gave only one direction for the entire second movement of the *Eroica* Symphony, it was the necessities of Toscanini's own understanding of the music that caused him alone to establish a single unifying tempo for the various

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> sections. And with no directions at all from Beethoven it was such necessities that produced the subtle modification of the single tempo, the distentions that built up the fugato section of the movement to a climax of shattering power . . .

the very image of discipline and authority which, at Toscanini's first rehearsal with the orchestra after six years, impelled the New York Philharmonic to begin "at once . . . to produce the razor-sharp attacks, the radiant sonorities, the transparent textures, the beautifully contoured phrases which . . . [he] had elicited in April 1936"; the unrelenting need, even into his eighties, to restudy works he had been performing for a half-century or more, in order to discover what would now seem to him the *only* right way among the astonishing variety of ways, within the composer's directions and the limits of a fiercely uncompromising taste, that he on one occasion or another considered the right ones for the works he best loved and most frequently performed; the whole "absorbed, unselfconscious operation of extraordinary powers that gave Toscanini's conducting the appearance of a natural act like a bird's flight, in which the powers operated with complete adequacy for each momentary situation but with no more than adequacy—an economy that was a form of honesty in relation to the material and situation and gave the operation a moral quality."

There was, also, the man who survived almost indestructibly into the age of technology and could never be reconciled to the uses to which it put or attempted to put him: who lived into the time and was among the founders of the virtuoso symphony orchestra, but who remained uninterested in the processes of recording that might have given the world and the future so very much truer an impression of the beauty and unique integrity of his performances of the symphonic repertoire; who could prefer NBC's dreadful Studio 8H to Carnegie Hall because from the podium in 8H all the orchestral strands were clear to *him*; who protected his gift by rage or indifference against the battery of twentieth-century advertising, friends, critics fawning and hostile; who lived for the talent that consumed him, so that his only cry of delight seems to have been, "Is like reading the score!"

In Mr. Haggin's account—and in the recorded performances, with a detailed discussion of which the book concludes—Toscanini is not (as he is made to appear in other accounts) a comically temperamental virtuoso, a sort of Maria Callas of conductors, not a childish uncultivated musician who happened to have the knack of directing an orchestra, but a man with an unprecedented gift that gave him no peace and left him little room for the simplest amenities. Mr. Haggin has amusing Toscanini stories to tell, including several that testify to the essential gentleness of the man; but even some of the most amusing are troubling as well, the grip of the obsession is almost always evident—

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"Put your blood!" he roared once at a rehearsal of an insignificant little Italian piece. "*I* put *my* blood!"

. . . in his dressing room . . . we found him fanning himself and worrying about the difficulties of recording. "I make *pianissimo* in *La Mer:* in hall is correct; on record is *not* correct! In 1936 I make *Rhine Journey* with Philharmonic. I go to Paris; a commission—Gilman, Betti, Chotzinoff—listen to record and say is good. In Carnegie Hall is right tempo; when I hear record, is wrong tempo. Last year I am in bed, and a friend telephone to me: 'Maestro, listen to radio.' I listen: is *Rhine Journey;* is good—is right tempo—IS MY *RHINE JOURNEY!* in 1936 is wrong tempo; now is right tempo! Ah *Dio santo!*" and he hurled the fan at the wall in despair.

So that finally the terrible scenes of the last rehearsals and the last broadcast in April 1954 seem foreordained, as the gift that had been transformed into something so demoniacally physical, so much a matter of presence and, almost, muscular strength, yields suddenly to age (at 87!) and there is nothing left. Mr. Haggin's Toscanini—as plainly authentic, on the evidence, as W. J. Turner's Mozart—is a tragic figure.

Nevertheless, what the book concerns itself with primarily and amply is the magnitude of the achievement, on which nobody has written better than Mr. Haggin in the past, and which nobody is better qualified to assess now that it endures only on often grossly defective recordings and in the memories of those who experienced it in the concert hall or over the radio. Musical performance is fleeting enough; even good recordings of the past are obviously only partly representative of what may be assumed to have taken place in the studio (and Mr. Haggin points out how RCA-Victor's engineers made hash out of some of the instrumental balances and dynamic contrasts that Toscanini so painstakingly worked out in the studio, not to mention what happened to the quality of the sound when transferred to discs); of such conductors as Wagner, Mahler, and Muck we have almost nothing except their reputations. About Toscanini we have, besides the reputation, a great deal of misinformation and misjudgment; but we also have the recordings, however imperfect, and we have Mr. Haggin's account. For those who are interested in the art of musical performance, and who wish to test their impressions and memories of the conductor who was, strangely, both the greatest and the most publicized musical performer of our century, *Conversations with Toscanini* is the book to read and to have at hand.

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